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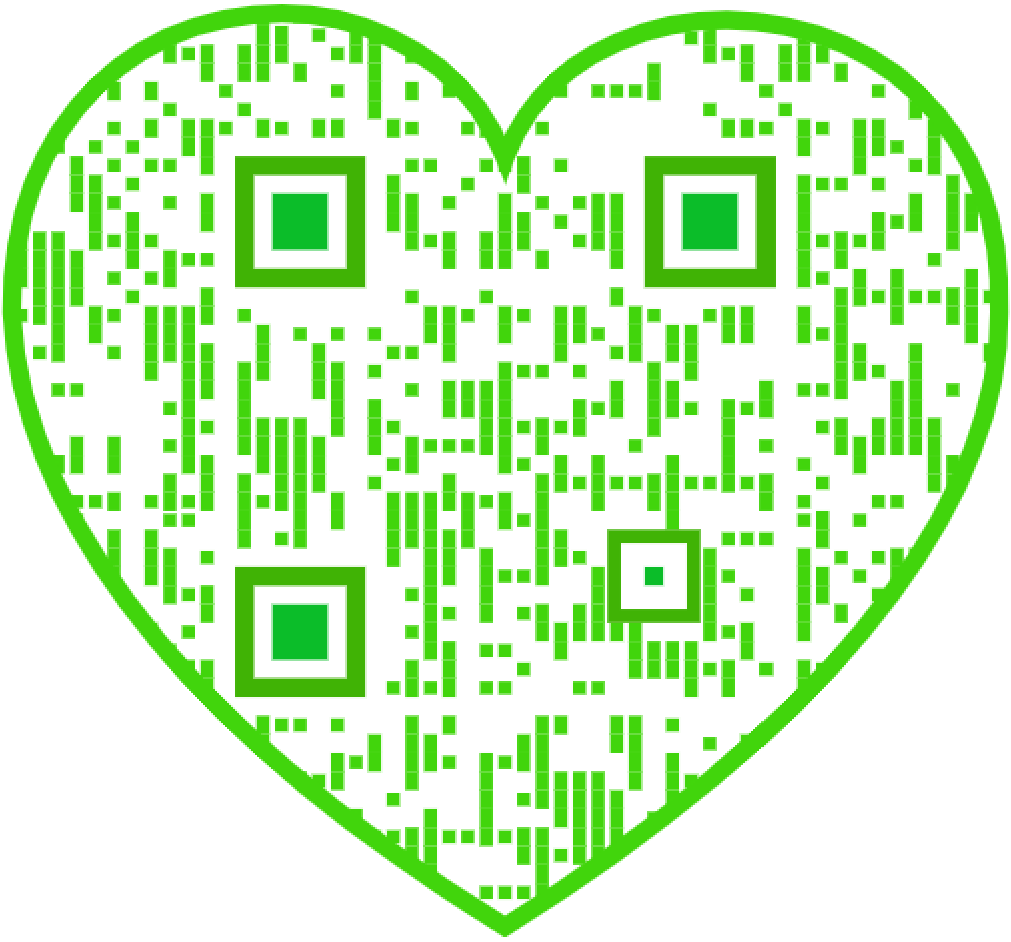
Grow your own

A COMPLETE GUIDE TO HOMEGROWN VEG, FRUIT & HERBS

Reissued for... 2025 Reissued for...

- ✔ Step-by-step advice
- ✔ Crops for pots
- ✔ Growing in shade
- ✔ Time-saving tips



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Welcome

Nothing beats the taste, or pleasure, of food you've grown and picked yourself. Fruit, veg and herbs, fresh from the plot, taste just as nature intended, beating anything you find in a shop. They're easy to grow, too – and you'll find all you need for success in this special edition from *BBC Gardeners' World Magazine*.

New to growing your own? We show you how to get started and guarantee tasty pickings this year. Pushed for time and space? We've ideas for the smallest plots (windowsills, too), plus ways to still enjoy homegrown even if you've only minutes to spare. You'll save money in the process too, with homegrown produce rewarding you with big savings on shop-bought produce.

Homegrown food is also far better for you than anything from the supermarket shelves – it's full of nutrients, free of sprays, and grown with love. So, let your healthy eating year start here!

Kevin

Kevin Smith
Editor, *BBC Gardeners' World Magazine*

From seed to harvest in just weeks, homegrown food is packed with flavour

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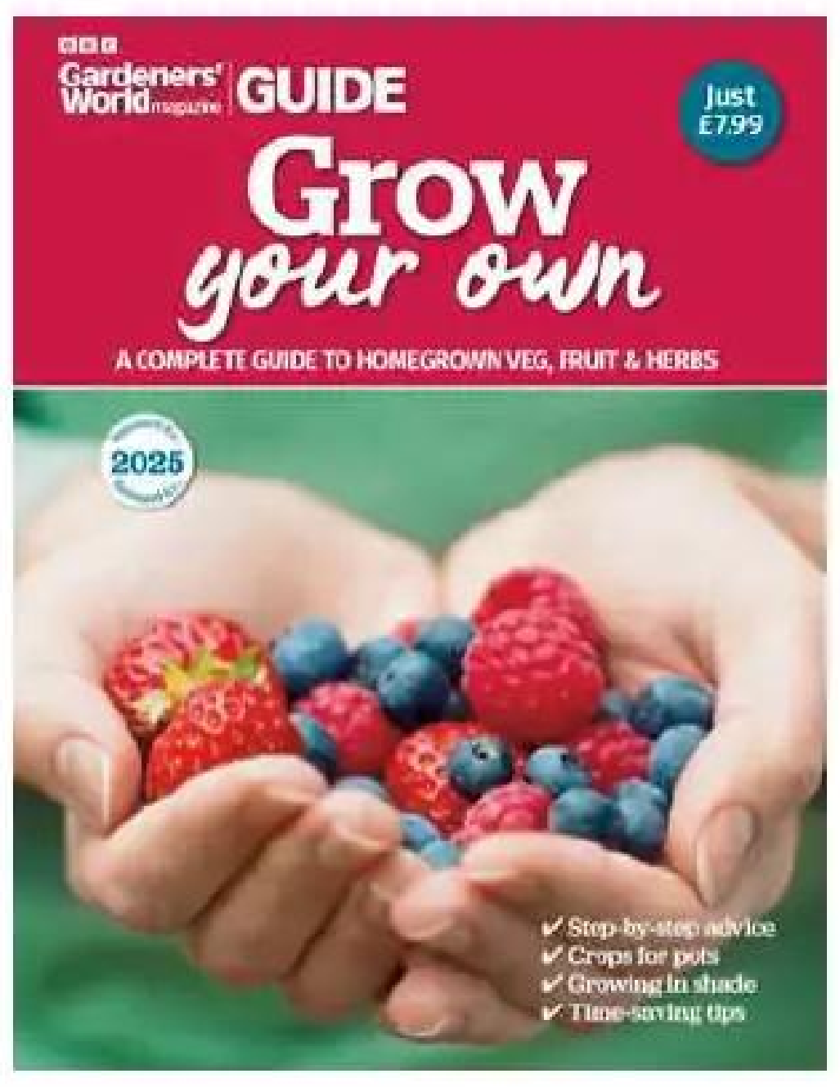
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Grow your own

How to get started

Growing your own is exciting and easy – just follow our guide to planning and taking the first steps, whether you're sowing vegetable seeds or planting fruit

Anyone can grow their own, no matter how limited the space. It's a wonderful way to put fresh fruit and veg on the table, knowing it's nutritious and delicious, and the only distance travelled is from the plot to the table. Everyone can have a go, and children love being involved. They'll enjoy sowing large seeds such as courgettes, or planting strawberries – which are easy to grow and produce quick results.

Don't worry if you've got limited time or resources, as there's still plenty you can grow. You can swap seeds with neighbours, family and friends or exchange produce when you've got too much. If you're short on time, have a look at our time-saving tips for getting a head start on growing (see p11) and choose crops that don't need too much maintenance.

The best bit about growing your own is spending time outdoors, getting your hands in the soil and growing produce that tastes great.

Where to plant

The first thing to decide is where you're going to plant your crops as this will determine what you can grow. Whether you've got lots of space or just a tiny patio, there are many crops to choose from

Many of us have little or no choice about where we can grow our fruit, veg and herbs. The options can be limited in a small garden, but if you're lucky enough to have a large garden or an allotment, there are several things to consider before picking the perfect location.

Most crops do best in a sunny, sheltered site – this combination of warmth and light will encourage plants to grow vigorously and produce abundant crops that ripen well. Don't worry if your plot is on the shady side, as many crops grown for leaves and stems do fine in semi-shade – although they won't grow as fast as in full sun.

You can grow fruit, veg and herbs in just about any kind of soil, but to thrive they need fertile soil that has an open structure to allow excess water to drain away. It should also contain lots of organic matter, such as well-rotted compost, that will hold in moisture so the soil doesn't dry out too quickly.

Crops grow well in raised beds, but they will thrive just as well in garden borders

Plant crops in borders

Make the most of existing borders by filling any gaps with edible plants that have attractive leaves, flowers or fruits, or ones that offer architectural appeal. Edibles with eye-catching leaves, flowers or fruits can easily hold their own among other plants in the garden. So why not make your borders more productive by plugging gaps between perennials and shrubs with fruit, veg and herbs? Just choose from the many varieties that combine good looks and flavour.

The colourful stems of chard will turn heads, especially the seed mix 'Bright Lights'. Or try one of the hardy kale varieties such as 'Black Tuscany' (also known as cavolo nero). This plant forms an upright rosette of puckered dark green leaves that add drama to any border, particularly in winter. And by filling gaps with crops, you'll also help to stop weeds germinating there. See p28-29 for more ideas for pretty and productive plots.

Make a kitchen garden

When space is no problem, you can grow a wide range of crops and, eventually, could supply home-grown produce for your meals for a good part of the year. If you're starting from scratch, consider creating a kitchen garden – an area dedicated to edible produce that is usually split into a series of beds with paths running between them.

Traditionally, a kitchen garden would be walled to provide shelter and a surface for climbing crops and trained fruit, but today it's more likely to be sectioned off by trellis screens or even a low, fruiting 'hedge' made of step-over apple trees.

An allotment is ideal if you have only a tiny garden. However, if you're a newcomer, don't be tempted to take on too much in your first season. If you plant a large plot with crops, they will all need watering, feeding and maintaining regularly and you'll have lots of soil to keep weed-free. It's a big commitment. Instead, try covering half or two-thirds of the plot with landscape fabric, then you can learn the ropes by cultivating the remaining area in your first year.

Use a raised bed

Growing veg in a raised bed is just like growing it in a very large container. It's simple to make your own, but you can buy a kit from a garden centre or an online retailer. Your raised bed can be any shape to suit your garden, but it must be a size that allows you to lean across to tend your crops without having to tread on the soil. The ideal size is 2.4m x 1.2m. Raise the sides high enough and you won't have to bend down too far either.

The advantage of a raised bed is that it doesn't matter what your garden soil is like, as you can fill your bed with compost or topsoil mixed with well-rotted organic matter. The soil in a raised bed warms up quickly in spring, which means you can start sowing your crops earlier in the season than if you were sowing straight into the ground – and earlier sowings means earlier harvests.

Try square foot gardening

This is a useful way to grow veg in a small plot. It involves sowing in small, raised beds divided into equal squares. Your crops can be kept separate by using string or bamboo canes. This intensive growing system is suited to successional sowings of salad crops and mini veg. As long as plants are well fed and watered, and pests and diseases kept at bay, close cropping gives high yields in a very limited space.

Plant crops in small spaces

Even if you have a tiny courtyard, a balcony or perhaps live in a flat with just a window box, you can still grow crops. Pots, hanging baskets, growing bags and other containers can be squeezed into the tightest spaces. The best veg for hanging baskets are those with a cascading habit or ones that remain compact such as tumbling tomatoes or strawberries. Alternatively, try dwarf French beans or cut-and-come-again salad leaves. Window boxes have more room than hanging baskets, so you can squeeze in more crops.

Planning & preparation

Before you can start planting and sowing fruit and veg, you need to do some groundwork, and to do groundwork you will need to have the right tools

Buy the best-quality tools you can afford, preferably rust-proof stainless steel ones. These should last a lifetime if you get into the habit of cleaning and drying them after use. When buying tools, pay attention to handles, as most gardeners find a D-shape more comfortable than a T-shape. Also check that the length of the shaft is suitable for your height. There are smaller, lightweight options, which can make life easier, as well as ranges for tall people.

Basic gardening kit

- ✔ **Garden fork** – good for lightly turning the soil or lifting compost.
- ✔ **Garden spade** – go for one with not too big a head, because a spadeful of damp soil is heavy.
- ✔ **Hoe** – for weeding between plants.
- ✔ **Rake** – for tidying and levelling the soil.
- ✔ **Hand trowel and fork** – for planting, weeding and general tidying.
- ✔ **Secateurs** – try for size before you buy.
- ✔ **Garden knife** – choose one with a safety blade.
- ✔ **Watering can** – ensure it comes with a rose for watering seedlings.
- ✔ **Sturdy bucket or wheelbarrow** – for transporting tools or collecting weeds and debris

Clean your tools after use and they should last a lifetime

Get rid of weeds

Remove any rubble and large stones from the soil, then weed thoroughly. Simply pull up a nnual weeds or slice them off with a hoe before they set seed. With perennial weeds, you need to remove the entire root system, otherwise they may regrow. Once you've cleared an area, make sure weeds don't re-grow by covering the soil to exclude light, until you're ready to start planting. Use landscape material or cardboard weighted down with stones.

Once your plot is clear of weeds you need to keep on top of them when crops are growing. Weeding is a bit like watering – it's time-consuming but essential. Weeds compete with crops for water and nutrients and, if left to grow, will end up smothering them. Prioritise digging out weeds that are fast-growing or about to set seed – this will keep things in check until you have more time. Weed methodically in blocks.

Get on top of perennial weeds at the beginning of the year by digging them out, roots and all. This should reduce the trouble they could cause you later in the year. Hoe annual weeds on a hot day as they'll shrivel and die quickly if left on the soil surface.

Weed well before sowing directly as it's very fiddly to weed between seedlings. If your weeds start to get out of hand, then commit some time to dealing with them.

Dig over your soil

Digging breaks up lumpy soil and relieves compaction, allowing in air and improving soil structure, especially of heavy clay. Early winter is the best time to dig as frost and rain will help to break down any big clods, as well as expose soil-borne pests to hungry birds. Once you've dug over the area, spread a thick layer of well-rotted garden compost or manure on top. This will be pulled down into the soil by worms and will slowly rot down to improve the texture of the soil, boost its nutrient content and improve its ability to retain moisture.

Test your soil

Your soil's pH value determines which plants you can grow there. Most crops need a neutral pH of 6.5-7. It's quick and easy to test your soil – just buy a testing kit, available in most garden centres. It is possible to alter the pH of your soil if you need to do so. If it's too acidic, you can add lime, or if it's too alkaline, add sulphur or sulphate of iron, but be sure to follow the instructions on the pack. However, as this takes time and effort, you may be better off growing your crops in raised beds that are filled with good-quality compost.

pH READING CHART
pH 7.5
Alkaline
pH 7.0
Neutral
pH 6.5
Slightly Acid
pH 6.0
Acid
pH 5.5
Acid
pH 5.0
Very Acid
pH Soil Tester Solution

Make the most of a small space by growing crops in raised beds

Plan your veg patch

First, decide which crops you'd like to grow by browsing our guides from p30 onwards. Then work out how much room they'll take up, using the spacing information given for each crop. While you can grow enough salad leaves for a few meals in just a few small pots, you'll need quite a large area to raise crops like potatoes. Then think about how you'll arrange your crops. Traditional-style planting can take up a lot of space, while raised beds look neat and let you squeeze many crops into a small area. You'll need to access your plot without walking on the soil as plants struggle to grow in compacted soil. So, plan out a network of paths that are wide enough for you to use a wheelbarrow without bashing into your crops.

TIME-SAVING TIPS

Buy plug plants

Growing from plug plants will save you time on sowing and potting on. Some plugs are tiny, but you can get larger ones, often called 'jumbo' plugs.

Try seed tape

Use seed tape to reduce time spent on thinning seedlings such as carrots and parsnips – the seeds are evenly spaced within the tape for easy sowing.

Invest in mature plants

A good time-saving alternative is to buy larger plants in pots in late spring that can be planted outside straight away. Ideal for herbs such as rosemary, thyme and bay.

Choose the right crops

If you're short on time, avoid high-maintenance crops. Go for ones that need little care once in the ground. These include onions, leeks, fruit bushes and potatoes.

Growing from seed

Harvesting crops that you've raised from seed is incredibly rewarding and surprisingly simple – it doesn't require any great technical skills or know-how. All you need to get things started is a packet of seeds, some soil or a pot of compost

Beginners may think that raising plants from seed is something best left to those with bags of experience, but in fact it's surprisingly easy, fun and rewarding. The seeds of some tender crops need to be started off indoors early in the year, while hardier crops can be sown directly into the soil. But beware – growing plants from seed is addictive. Once you've experienced the thrill of seeing your first seedlings appear, you'll find you can't stop sowing!

Sowing outdoors

Some seeds can be sown directly into the soil outdoors, either by broadcast sowing (scattering over the soil) or in shallow trenches called drills. This makes the most of the available space and gives you easy access to plants for any maintenance work, weeding and harvesting.

1 Rake the soil well to remove any lumps and hollows. Aim to create a level surface, then make a drill with a hoe. Use a cane or line of string to keep drills straight.

2 Sow the seeds along the drill, spacing them according to the instructions on the packet. Cover the seeds with soil, firm down gently with the back of a rake and water gently.

Sowing indoors

Tomatoes, chillies, sweet peppers, aubergines and some other crops need a long growing season and are best sown indoors early in the year. They'll get off to a good start protected from the cold.

1 Almost fill a small pot with seed compost, level the surface with your fingers, then press down with the base of a similar-sized pot to level out the surface.

2 For small seeds, sow thinly across the surface of the compost. For larger seeds like courgettes, sow one or two per pot. Cover with a thin layer of compost or vermiculite.

3 You can also sow in modules or seed trays. Add a label so you know what you've sown, then water gently with a watering can fitted with a rose, so you don't wash away the compost or dislodge the seeds.

4 Place the pots or seed trays in a windowsill propagator. Alternatively, cover your pots with clear plastic bags or the tops of plastic bottles. Uncover as soon as seedlings appear.

Pot seedlings on

When seedlings are about 7-10cm, or have developed their first true leaves, pot them up individually into their own small pot. Split the rootball apart gently, holding the seedlings gently by the leaves, never by the stems. Make a hole in the compost then lower the seedling in, ensuring that the roots are covered.

Harden off seedlings

If you read the growing instructions on some seed packets, you're likely to come across the words 'harden seedlings off before planting outdoors'. This may sound technical, but it's nothing to worry about – it simply means that your cosseted indoor seedlings need to be slowly acclimatised to life outdoors.

To do this, work out when you're going to plant them in the garden, then the week beforehand take them outside during the day and bring them back indoors overnight.

Alternatively, place the seedlings in a cold frame, if you have one, remembering to close the lid in the late afternoon. This will protect them from cooler night-time temperatures.

Edge borders with fruit

A sunny border is a great place to grow fruit. Strawberries – both tiny alpines or those with larger summer fruits – are perfect as border edgings, as are step-over apples and pears, which act like a low-growing fruiting hedge. Half-standard or other free-standing forms of fruit tree can be grown in a border. Another way to add height is to grow scrambling plants up a tree stake. The compact blackberry 'Loch Maree', with its large, glossy berries, or a golden-fruited raspberry, would look striking among perennials.

Easy ways to plant fruit

Fruit bushes and trees are a fantastic feature for any size garden. Discover the many ways to include them in your plot, whether it's an apple tree adding height to the border or blueberries in a pot

There's a wide range of delicious fruiting plants to choose from, of all shapes and sizes. In addition to their sweet, juicy harvests, many also offer flowers or structural interest. So get creative and put your fruit centre stage.

Grow fruit against a wall

Espalier or cordon apple trees are perfect, along with fan-trained cherry, plum and peach trees. Figs are another option, as well as delicious, succulent fruits, many varieties also have gorgeous, deeply lobed leaves. Although not widely grown, kiwi vines are becoming more readily available and are a good choice for a warm wall. As well as clusters of downy fruits, these vigorous climbers offer large, dramatic leaves and stems that are clad in red hairs. Other contenders include a grapevine, blackberries or raspberries.

Choose the right form

There are several ways you can buy fruit trees.

Cordon A plant with a single stem that is either vertical or at a 45-degree angle.

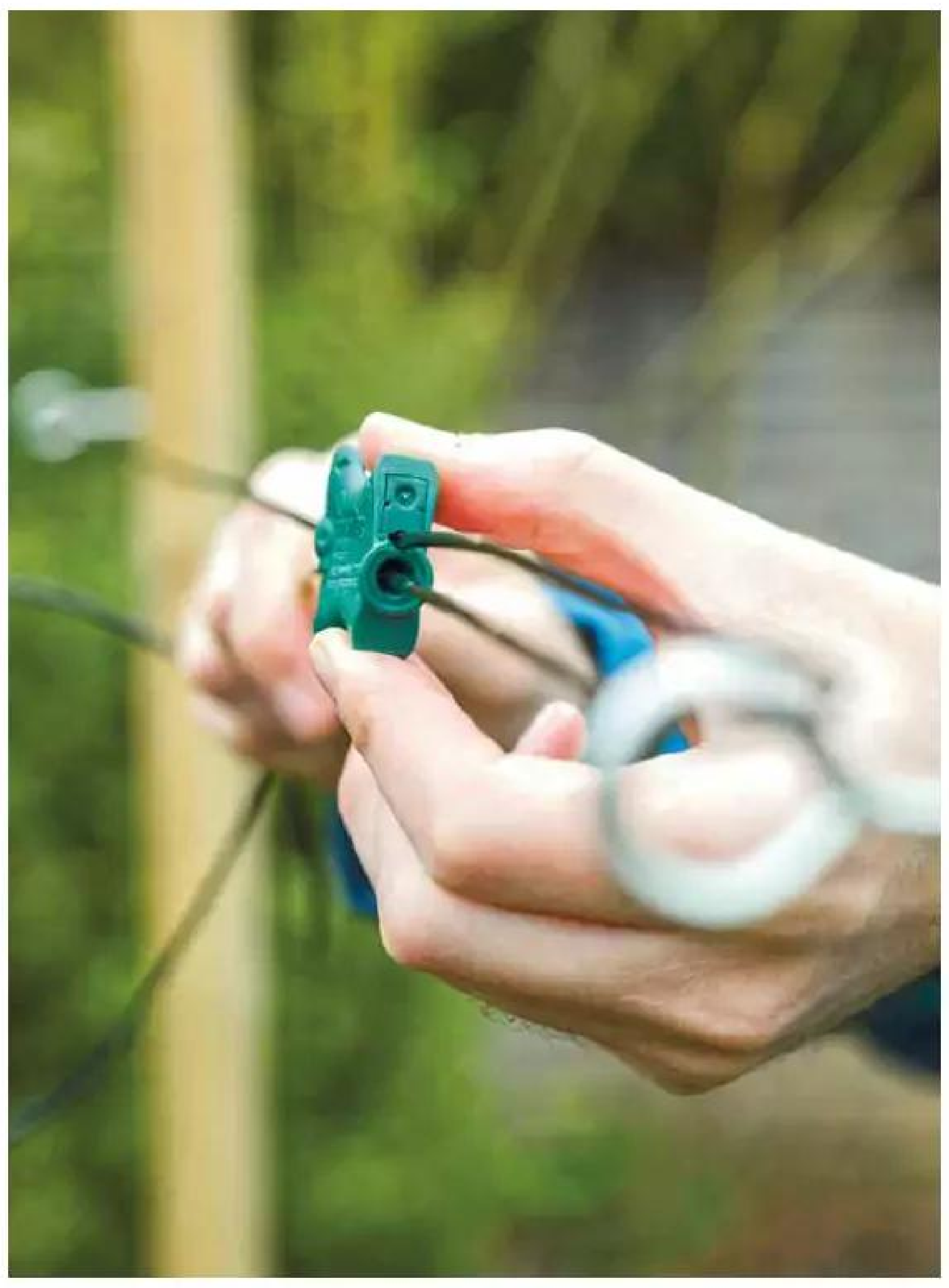
Espalier A tree trained with several tiers of horizontal branches.

Fan This tree has many branches radiating from the trunk in a fan shape.

Step-over A low, fruiting hedge, usually a single-tier espalier apple or pear. Perfect for edging a border.

Give fruit some support

To make supports for fruit, use heavy-duty 12-gauge wire secured to eye bolts. Wires should be cut with special clippers and fitted in horizontal tiers – the space between the wires will depend on the crop you want to support. After attaching the wires, tighten them so that they can support the stems, but don't over-tighten them on fences as this could put too much strain on the structure. Remove any loose ends, and always wear gloves and goggles when handling wire to prevent accidents.



Fan-trained fruit trees make a great architectural feature, but fruit trees look just as attractive grown in containers

Grow in pots

Did you know you can grow most fruit in pots? But to make the most impact, try grouping containers together or combine several plants in the same container. Blueberries and trailing cranberries need an ericaceous (acidic) compost. Unlike blueberries, cranberries thrive in boggy conditions so they will need more water and are best grown in pots that only have small drainage holes so that water can't easily escape from the pot. If you like gooseberries, a great way to make the most of your space is to choose a half-standard bush and plant herbs or salad leaves underneath it.

Use hanging baskets

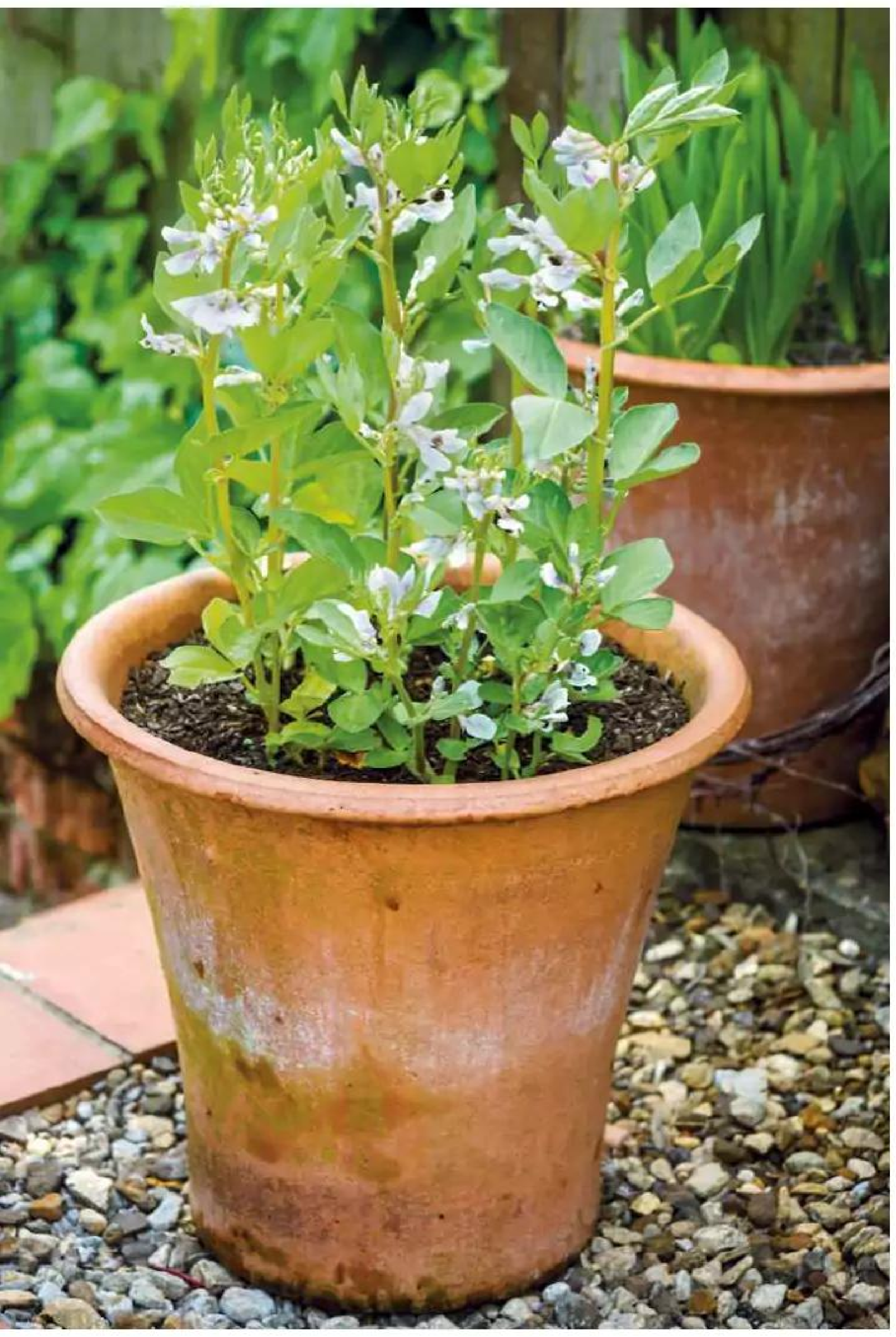
Even if your garden is the size of a postage stamp, you can still grow fruit by using hanging baskets. Strawberries are perfect for this, as raising them off the ground will ensure the dangling fruits remain clear of the soil and are less likely to be pecked by birds or eaten by slugs. For added interest, you can try varieties with pink flowers such as Pink Wonder® or large, or unusually shaped, fruits.

Crops for containers

Growing fruit and veg in containers is easy, meaning you can have tasty pickings from patios and windowsills. Just choose compact varieties for bumper harvests from the smallest spaces

You can grow an amazing range of veg, salad crops, herbs and fruit in pots, window boxes and even hanging baskets on a sunny patio, balcony or windowsill. For best results, choose plants that are specially bred for growing in containers – check on the seed packet or plant label for information. Dwarf, compact and mini-vegetable varieties are ideal. You can space these plants more closely than larger-growing ones, and harvest them when young and tender. Popular compact crops include carrots, beetroot, dwarf squash, chillies, tomatoes, courgettes and strawberries.

As plants in pots only have a relatively small amount of compost to sustain their growth, you need to feed and water them more often than those in the ground. And if you go away for a weekend when the weather is warm, set up an automatic watering system or ask a neighbour or friend to water your pots. If the compost dries out, the plants will become stressed, which reduces yields and makes them more vulnerable to pests and diseases.



Choose the right container

Glazed ceramic pots with large drainage holes in the base are perfect. Small containers and porous terracotta pots dry out quickly in hot weather, unless you line them with plastic pierced with drainage holes. Plastic pots are a good choice, but they may need weighting down with stones in the base to stabilise them. You could also use recycled food cans or plastic storage boxes – whatever takes your fancy – as long as you drill holes in the base to prevent waterlogging.

Go for compact crops

Broad beans are perfect for pots if you choose compact varieties. The pods can be eaten young, or left to mature so you can enjoy the seeds. From March, sow six to eight seeds in a 45cm pot. To prevent blackfly and help the pods swell, pinch out the shoot tips. Try these compact varieties: 'Statissa' or 'The Sutton'.

Combine companion plants

Home-grown tomatoes can't be beaten for flavour. Bush varieties are ideal for pots and don't need to be trained or the side shoots removed to encourage good harvests. Spring onions make a useful companion plant, helping to ward away pests. Others to try are mint or marigolds.

To plant a companion combo choose a wooden planter that is at least 40cm wide to hold one bush tomato plant, with spring onions sown around it. Place in a sunny spot

How to plant

Get your veg plants off to a good start with a large pot, some good compost and plenty of sunshine.

1 Choose a large 40cm wide pot with holes in the base. Fill with multi-purpose compost, mixing in slow-release fertiliser to provide nutrients through the season.

2 Add young veg plants such as kale, courgettes or tomatoes. Keep under cover until after the frosts are over. Keep well watered during the growing season.

Ornamen
Onion

For tiny spaces

Herbs and salad leaves can be grown in a shallow container or window box – a depth of 10cm is all you need, and add a mulch of grit to hold in moisture. Use lots of contrasting colours and textures, such as toothed rocket leaves against the soft, frilly lobes of lettuce 'Lollo Rossa' or dainty flat-leaved parsley next to the purple of a beet leaf.

5 of the best crops for time-poor gardeners

Growing veg can be time-consuming, but if you choose your crops carefully you can reduce your workload and still enjoy abundant harvests. Pick fruit, veg and herbs that are easy to grow, can be sown or planted direct and are not troubled by many pests and diseases.

Courgettes
These are quick to germinate and easy to grow. Sow direct or plant out in late May (buy young plants to save time). One or two plants are plenty – they stay productive for weeks, providing you keep picking, otherwise they turn into marrows! *See p46 for how to grow.*

Dwarf French beans
Sow in open ground or containers in mid-May to early August. They're easy to look after, as no thinning out or supports are needed. The same plants crop for three to four weeks, so sow a row every three weeks for a supply all summer. *See p36 for how to grow.*

Strawberries
Once planted, strawberry plants should crop well for three or four years. Barely any maintenance is needed – just put a layer of straw or a strawberry mat underneath ripening fruit to stop them rotting on wet soil, tidy up the plants in spring and protect fruits from hungry birds. *See p90 for how to grow.*

Rosemary
This herb is evergreen, so it provides useful pickings all year round. Plant in the right place – a sunny, sheltered spot with free-draining soil and it shouldn't cause any trouble. All rosemary needs is a trim after flowering to keep it looking neat. *See p103 for how to grow.*

Rhubarb

Easy to grow and crops for many years, rhubarb provides a harvest when other crops are thin on the ground, and you can force it to get an earlier flush.

See p89 for how to grow.

Kale

This hardy crop tolerates light shade. Grow a range of colours, such as ‘Black Tuscany’, ‘Red Winter’ and ‘Dwarf Green Curled’. Pick regularly to encourage more leaves.

See p50 for how to grow.

5 of the best for shady areas

By working out how much shade you have and choosing your crops carefully, it is possible to grow far more veg than you might think. Sun-loving, fruiting crops, such as tomatoes, cucumbers and aubergines, are never going to thrive in shade, but be realistic and there are plenty of tasty veg and herbs that are worth growing.

Chard

This can take moderate shade as long as it gets two to three hours a day of direct sunlight. It might grow more slowly but you'll still get a good harvest. Pick leaves when young for salads or, when larger, as spinach. 'Bright Lights' has colourful stems. *See p67 for how to grow*.

Gooseberries

This easy shrub will grow in many types of soil and can cope with shade. Strong-growing culinary varieties such as 'Invicta' and 'Greenfinch' do well. Dessert varieties will crop in shade, but may be less sweet than when grown in sun. *See p82 for how to grow.*

Leeks

These need some sun to ensure a good crop, but they can cope with shade. If you have a spot in the garden that gets morning sun and afternoon shade, give leeks a go. Try reliable varieties such as 'Musselburgh' and 'Autumn Giant 2 – Argenta'. *See p51 for how to grow.*

Mint

Herbs that don't like their soil drying out in summer do well in shade. They produce better crops if not subjected to midday sun, and are less likely to bolt into flower. Mint likes shade, but its flavour may be less intense than in sun. *See p100 for how to grow.*

5 of the best for a quick crop

Some veg crops can take months of cosseting before you can enjoy their harvests, but others are ready in a matter of weeks – ideal if you're the impatient type or are growing them with kids. Some of these also make good picks for intercropping – growing among more slow-maturing crops like sweetcorn or tomatoes.

Radishes

One of the easiest crops to grow, and among the speediest, too – you could get a crop in as little as four weeks. Radishes also take up very little space. They're ideal for growing with kids and come in a range of shapes and colours. *See p61 for how to grow.*

Rocket

Another easy crop, peppery rocket can be grown in the ground or in pots. Sow in batches from March to September, and from the first crop after four weeks, you'll be able to enjoy continuous pickings from April to October. *See p63 for how to grow.*

Thyme

Buy a good-sized plant and you'll be able to take pickings in no time, but let it settle in before harvesting too heavily. Plant in spring or autumn so that it's established for winter and this herb will give you an all-year-round harvest. *See p106 for how to grow.*

Raspberries

It's hard to find fast-growing fruit, but raspberries are one fruit that crop when young. Summer varieties crop on stems made the previous year, so buy 'long canes' with pre-formed flower buds. Plant in autumn to spring for a June-October harvest. *See p88 for how to grow.*

Turnips

These vastly underrated vegetables are delicious to eat and easy to grow. You can harvest the baby roots when they are golf ball size after a couple of months.

See p71 for how to grow.

Runner beans

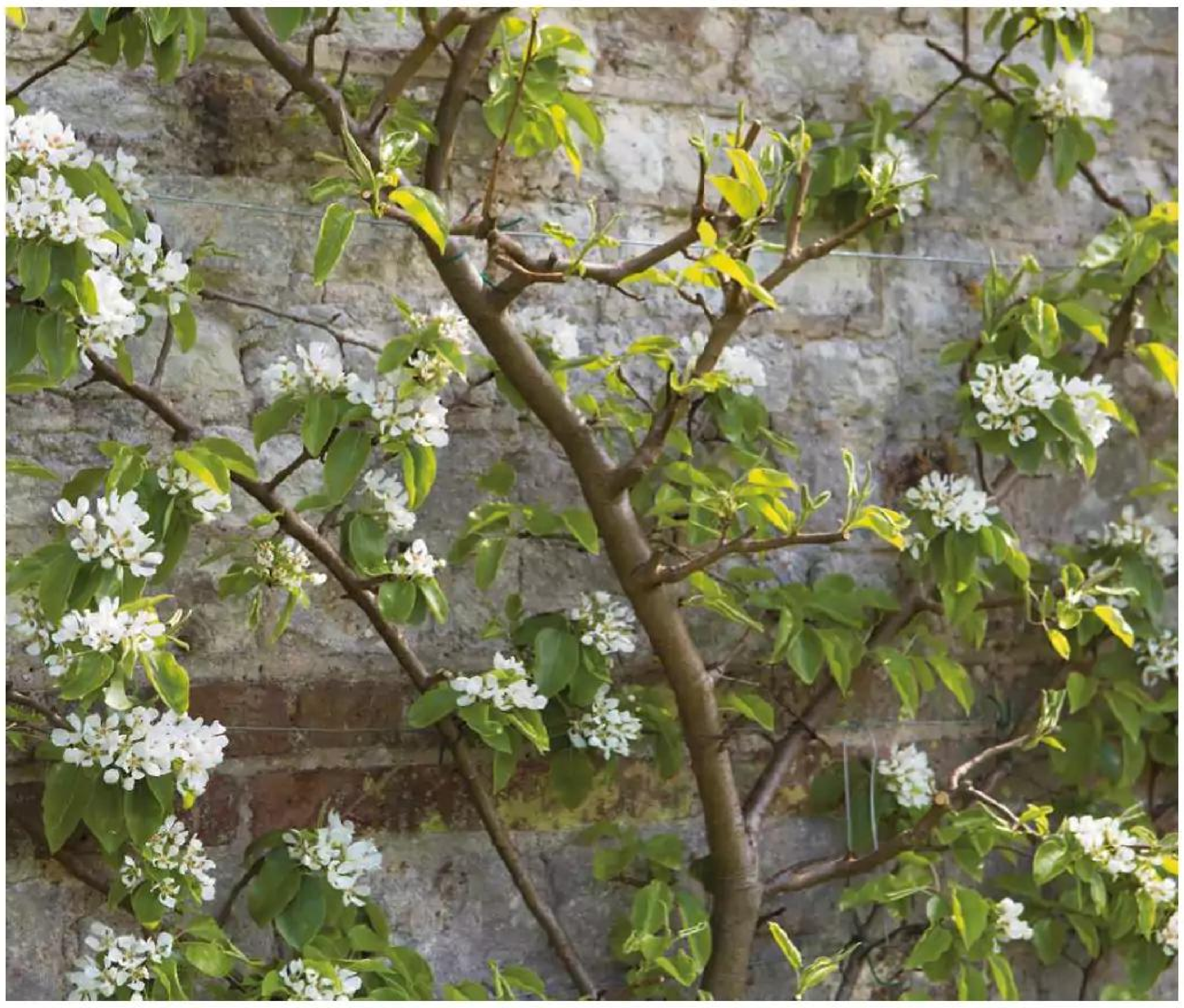
These heavy-yielding climbers crop all summer, so one sowing should be enough. Easy and reliable, and their flowers are pretty enough to grow up a fence or trellis.

Time to harvest: 3 months.

See p37 for how to grow.

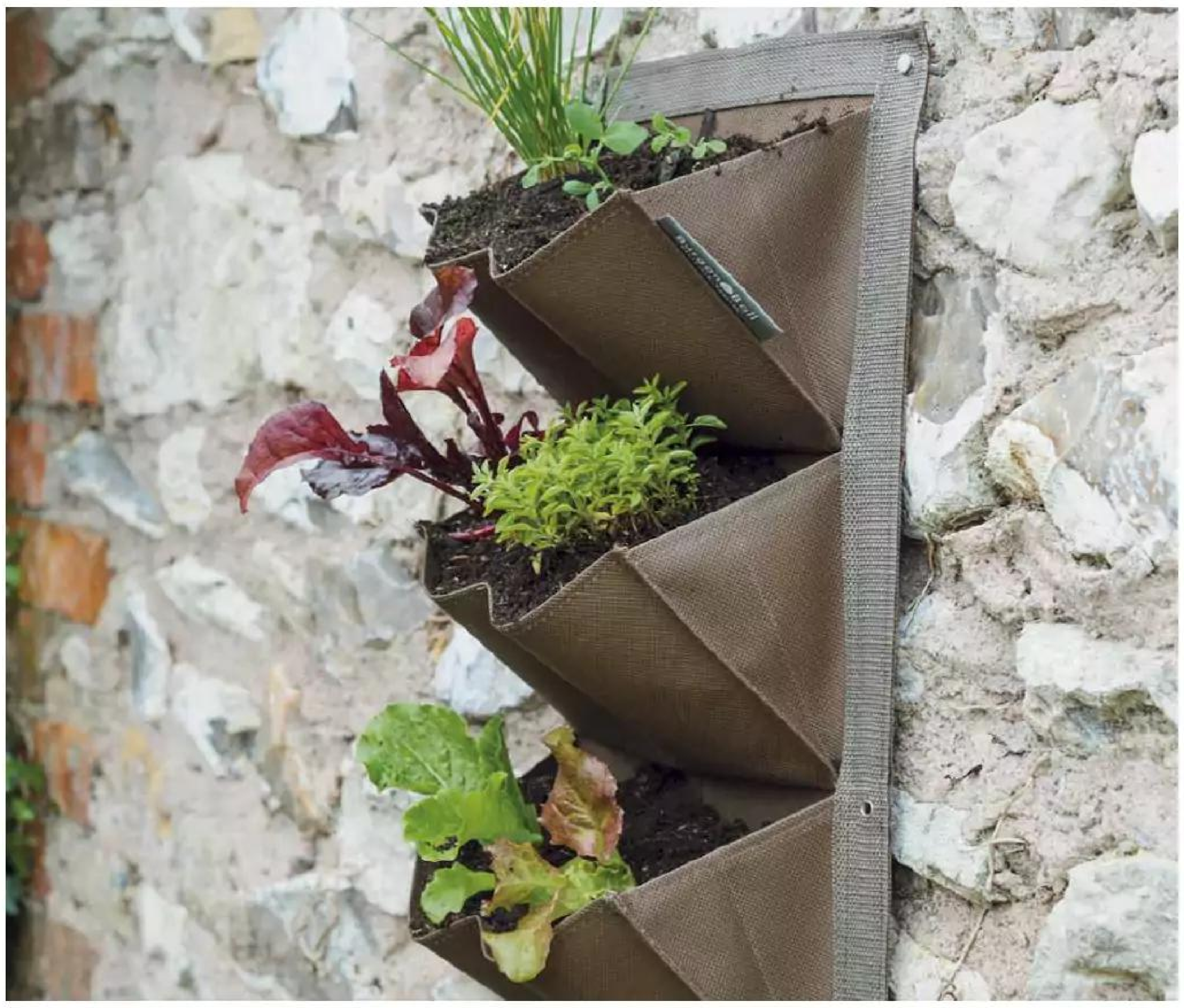
5 of the best for
growing on boundaries

Make the most of your outdoor space by using boundaries to grow climbing veg up, or use your crops as screening to add some privacy. Climbing veg, like runner beans, will cover a trellis quickly and they have attractive flowers, or try a fruit or bay tree that will bring height to your garden and create a useful screen.



Espalier fruit trees

Plant an espalier against a sunny wall or use several to create a see-through screen. The lateral branches are trained horizontally to encourage them to grow outward rather than upward. Apples or pears can be grown this way. *See p74 for how to grow.*



Salad leaves

Attaching guttering or pocket planters to a wall or fence is a great way to make more of your space if you have limited room on the ground. Salad leaves don't need deep soil, so are ideal crops for small spaces or shallow containers. *See p63 for how to grow.*

Peas

Dwarf varieties can be supported with sticks, but taller types can be grown up trellis or wigwams next to a fence and make attractive screening for a boundary as they have pretty flowers set against vibrant foliage. Tie them in as they grow. *See p55 for how to grow.*

Bay trees

A small tree creates a good screen from neighbours and adds height to the garden. Pick a small evergreen bay tree and it will have the bonus of looking good all year round, with leaves that can be used to add flavour to stews. *See p94 for how to grow.*

5 of the best for growing in containers

You don't need a large garden to grow fruit and veg. Many crops will thrive in containers on the patio or a balcony. Pots can also be moved to take advantage of micro-climates, like a sunny, sheltered patio. Even if you have a veg patch, a few pots by the back door are useful when you just want to grab a handful of something. *For advice on growing in pots, see p16.*

Chillies

These are colourful, attractive and trouble-free. Choose your favourite variety for heat and flavour and grow three plants in a large tub on the patio with a cane for support. They'll provide ample crops, with enough left over to store over winter. *See p56 for how to grow.*

Potatoes

Easy to grow in large pots, or a big bag such as an old compost bag, and they require little maintenance this way. Place seed potatoes on a layer of compost, cover with more compost and leave to grow. When leaves appear, cover with more compost. *See p58 for how to grow.*

Chives

This herb has attractive flowers that bees love. It will thrive in a pot, ready for quick snippings to sprinkle over salads and soups, and it's also easy to grow. Once the plant has filled the pot, divide the clump and make more plants for free. *See p97 for how to grow.*

Blueberries

These need acidic soil and should be grown in a pot that's at least 30cm deep and wide. Give them a sunny, sheltered spot and water with rainwater if possible. Protect ripe fruits from birds. Be patient as blueberries don't produce fruit until their third year. *See p78 for how to grow.*

Apples

Thanks to dwarfing rootstocks, apples now grow very well in containers – recommended rootstocks include M26 or M9. Give trees a sunny, sheltered spot. If you have room for only one plant, choose a self-fertile variety or a family tree, on to which several varieties are grafted. Use a pot that's at least 45-50cm wide.

See p74 for how to grow.

Figs

Fig trees have architectural foliage and can be grown against a trellis or fence to add an attractive element to a boundary. In the border they also add height.

See p81 for how to grow.

5 of the best for a productive & pretty plot

Even if you don't have room for a veg patch, you can still have a productive garden. Many crops are beautiful and can be grown among plants in a border. For a decorative effect try growing red and green lettuce in a weave on one side of a garden or mix tall-growing plants with shorter ones, like sweetcorn and ground cherries.

Lettuce

There are many attractive varieties of hearting lettuce such as 'Merveille de Quatre Saisons' or loose leaf tyes like 'Lollo Rosso' that will stand out in the border. They can be planted among other plants or in rows for a striking feature. *See p52 for how to grow.*

Sage

A decorative evergreen herb that doesn't look out of place in ornamental borders. The leaves are pretty, especially those of purple sage, and perfect for pairing with meat or chicken dishes. Sage has the bonus of beautiful summer flowers too. *See p104 for how to grow.*

Broad beans

This is an easy crop with beautiful flowers that are often white, but there are some varieties with red or scarlet flowers such as 'Crimson Flowered', which are even prettier and perfect for including in an ornamental border. *See p35 for how to grow.*

Plums

If you have room for a small tree, a plum is a wonderful addition to the garden with blossom in spring and a bountiful summer crop with fruits that come in eye-catching colours. However, you will have to wait for one or two years depending on the variety. *See p87 for how to grow.*

Grow your own Vegetables

There's nothing more exciting than planning what to plant in your plot. Discover everything you need to know to ensure bumper crops in our vegetable grow guides

The diversity of vegetables you can grow may seem a little bewildering if you've never had a go before, but if you stick to what you like to eat you won't go far wrong.

What you grow is up to you – if you hate cabbage, don't grow it. Before you start, work out what your favourites are and how often your family eats them. Grow as much as you can of what you love to eat and make several separate sowings (known as successional sowing), so everything doesn't ripen at the same time and swamp you.

And take time to look for unusual crops that are expensive or hard to find in the shops – that way you'll have a mix of your favourites and some special treats.

The main priorities to bear in mind when planning what to grow are finding crops that suit both the time and space you have available. Although we all start with good intentions, busy lives often get in the way of high-maintenance crops.

But that doesn't mean you can't enjoy growing your own – just choose plants that need minimal attention, and concentrate on varieties that are renowned for excellent flavour or good ornamental looks.

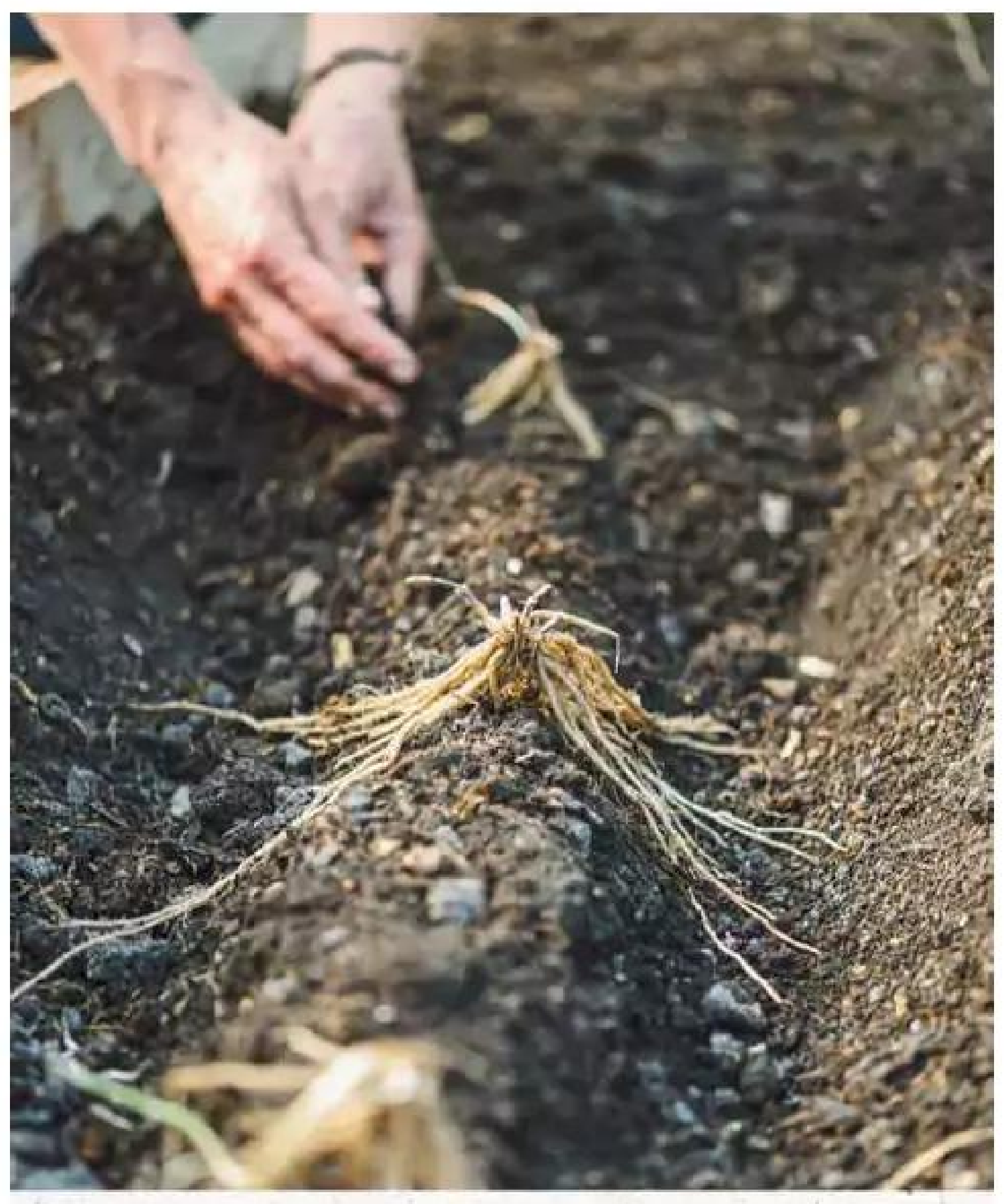
Asparagus

The taste of fresh asparagus in May is well worth waiting for. A perennial crop, established asparagus plants will provide an annual harvest of tasty spears for up to 20 years. Give asparagus plenty of space and grow it in a sheltered, sunny site with free-draining soil. Avoid growing in shady spots, heavy clay soil or containers.

	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
PLANT			●									
HARVEST				●	●	●						

SPACING 5cm deep, 30cm apart, 45cm between rows

AVG. YIELD 9-12 spears per crown



Sowing and planting

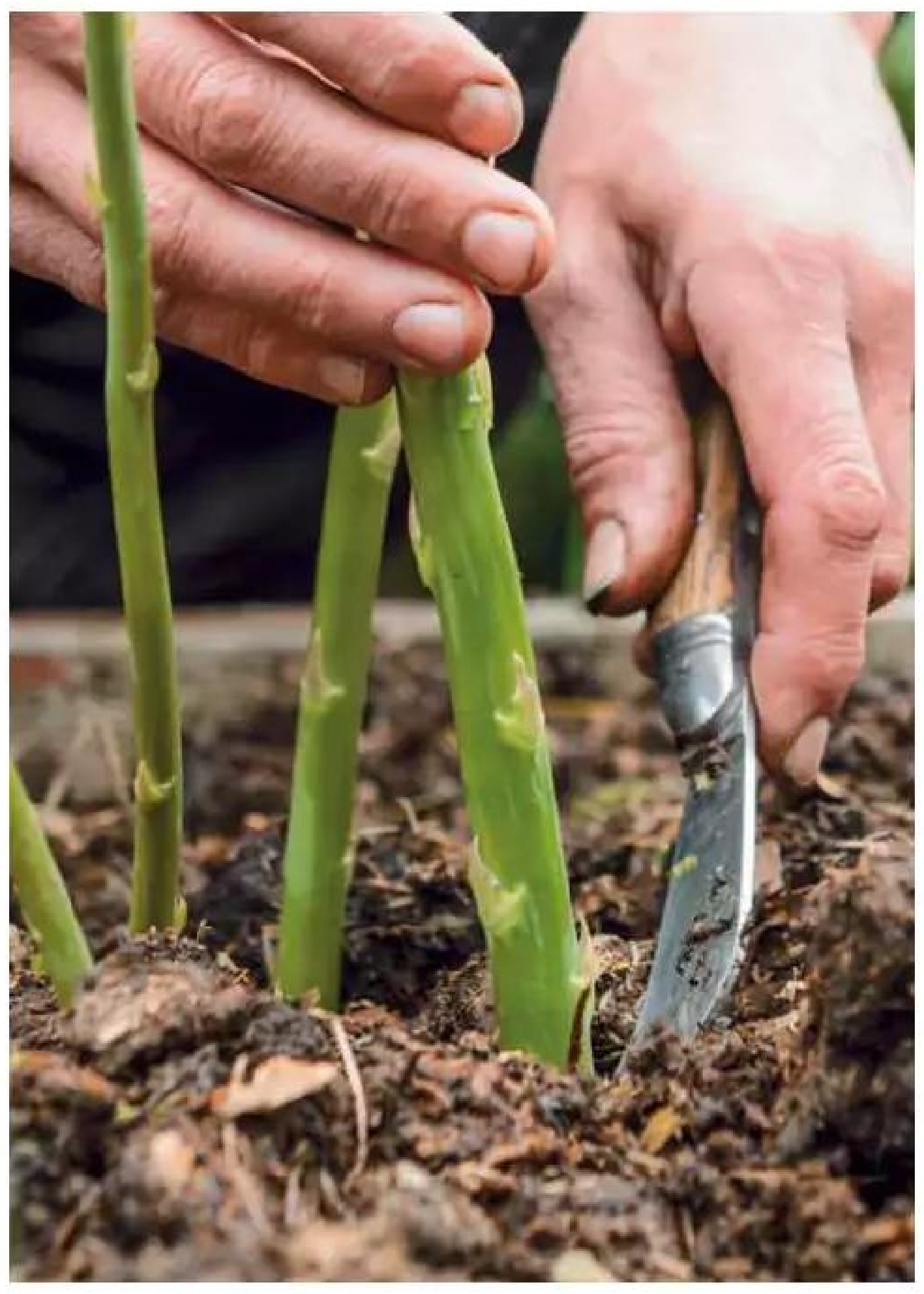
- Prepare the soil by thoroughly digging it over, removing any weeds and mixing in organic matter such as well-rotted manure.
- A week before planting, scatter general fertiliser over the area and fork in, then rake the ground level.
- Dig a trench, 30cm wide by 20cm deep, and part-fill with soil down its length to make a mound 10cm high.
- Take the asparagus crowns and place them 30cm apart on top of the mound, spreading out the roots on either side.
- Cover the crowns with 5cm of soil. As the plants grow, cover them with more soil, with the aim of eventually filling the trench.

Crop care

Keep newly planted crowns well watered until established and ensure the area is kept weed-free to prevent competition for light and nutrients. Avoid harvesting asparagus spears for two years after planting, as this will weaken the plants and lead to smaller harvests in the long term. Instead, let the crowns develop ferny foliage, enabling them to photosynthesise and grow into healthy, strong plants.

Harvesting

Asparagus is ready to harvest two years after planting one-year-old crowns. Harvest spears when they reach 12cm in length, cutting them off the crowns beneath the soil with a serrated knife. Stop harvesting in mid-June to allow the plant to build up energy for the following year.



Jersey Knight

Storage

Asparagus will keep for a few days in the fridge if placed upright in a jar with a little water. The spears can be blanched for five minutes and then kept in the freezer for longer-term storage.

Troubleshooting

Slugs and snails can be a problem, feeding on new shoots and young plants. Try eggshells scattered around the crowns or use biological controls. Keep an eye out for asparagus beetle which will damage leaves and stems – destroy any you see in spring by hand.

Preparation and uses

Eat fresh from the plot, steamed or grilled and served with a knob of butter. Or wrap in pancetta and bake in the oven. Young stems take only a few minutes to cook. Bend each stalk until the end snaps off to remove the woody part.

5 TO TRY...

'ARIANE'

A very productive variety with large yields of tasty, purple-tipped spears.

'CONNOVER'S COLOSSAL'

This reliable heritage variety has an Award of Garden Merit. It produces exceptionally large yields.

'CRIMSON PACIFIC'

This newer, purple-speared variety has a sweet flavour and tender stems.

'JERSEY KNIGHT'

A very heavy cropper with spears up to 2cm thick and good resistance to disease.

'PACIFIC 2000'

A vigorous, heavy cropper with a delicious flavour and tender stems that can be used in salads.

Harvest asparagus when the spears are 12cm long

Aubergines

These tasty Mediterranean vegetables can be grown in a sheltered, sunny position. The glossy fruits can be grilled, roasted and stuffed and used to make a number of delicious dishes like curries, ratatouille or baba ganoush (smoky aubergine dip).

	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
SOW	●	●	●	●								
PLANT					●	●						
HARVEST							●	●	●			

SPACING 2.5cm deep, 40-45cm apart, 40-45cm between rows

AVG. YIELD Around six fruits per plant for larger varieties, 10 for smaller types

Sowing and planting

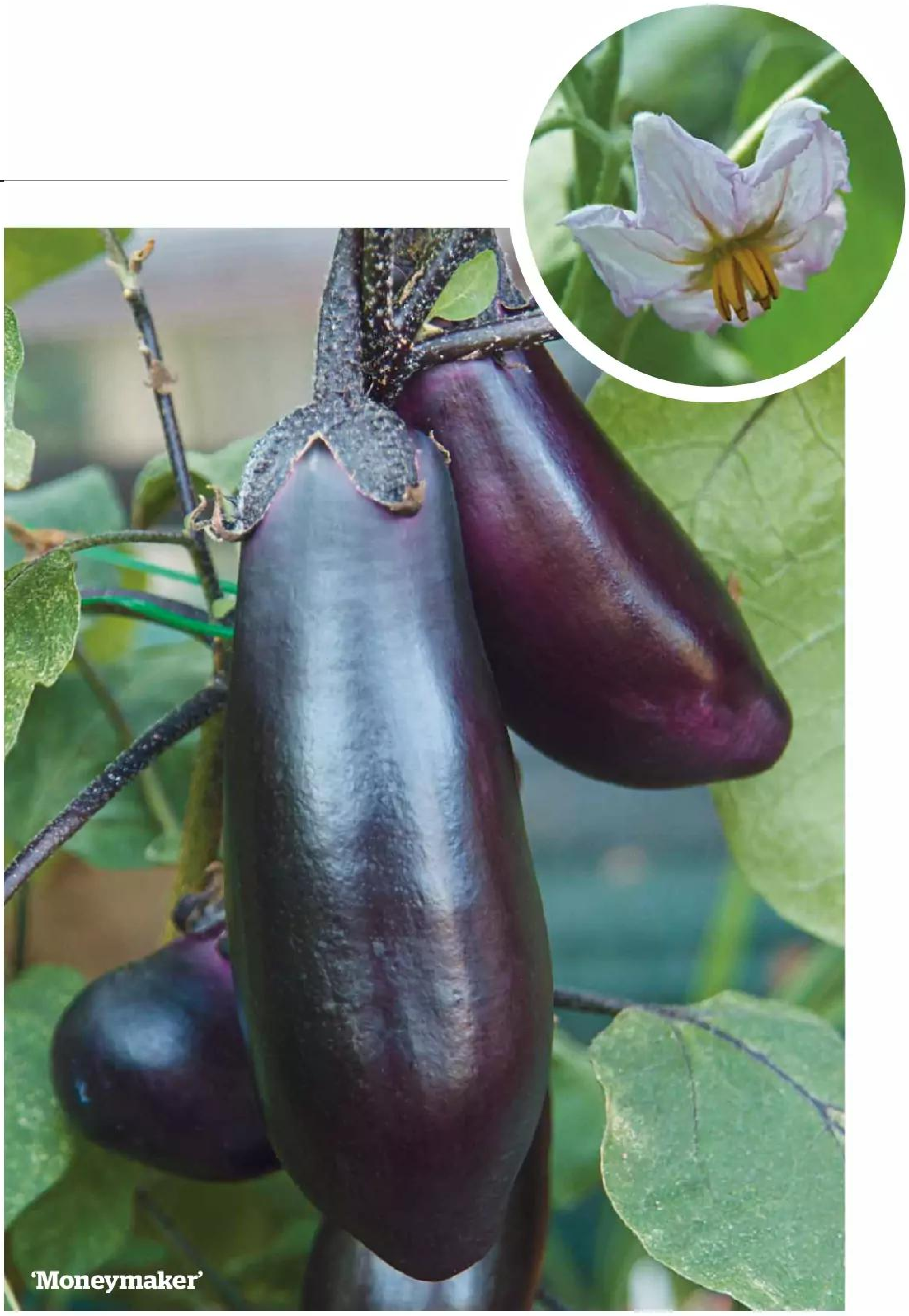
- Sow seeds indoors into seed modules or a tray. Place your tray in a propagator, or cover with plastic or a clear plastic bag.
- Prick out the seedlings into small pots when about 5cm tall, and grow on before moving to their final location.

Crop care

Grow on in a greenhouse, or a sheltered site in full sun outdoors, although don't move plants outside until all risk of frost has passed. Plant into large pots filled with compost.

To encourage fruit, gently tap, shake or mist the flowers with water to help release the pollen, or entice bees into your greenhouse or sunny corner by planting other favourite pollinator plants nearby.

Pinch out the growing tips of the main stems when 30cm high to encourage side shoots to develop. Once plants start to flower, feed weekly with a high-potash fertiliser or tomato feed, and mist fruits with water to encourage the fruits to set. When you have five to six fruits, remove small fruiting shoots. Taller varieties may need staking, particularly when fruits are ripening. Keep well watered.



'Moneymaker'

Harvesting

The general rule is to pick the fruits before the skin loses its glossy sheen. This can be a symptom of over-ripeness, but check the habit of the variety you are growing as some aubergines have less shiny skins.

Troubleshooting

If you're growing aubergines in the greenhouse, plants may be attacked by aphids, red spider mite, whitefly and thrips. Aubergines can also be affected by blossom end rot. Try interplanting them with French marigolds to deter whitefly. There are biological controls available for tackling aphids, red spider mite and whitefly.

Preparation and uses

Aubergines are best picked fresh and cooked immediately. Some varieties need slicing and salting before cooking to remove any bitterness in the flesh.

'Fairy Tale'

5 TO TRY...

'ASIAN BRIDE'
Bears finger-sized fruits that mature from creamy white to an attractive pink-purple blush.

'FAIRY TALE'
Compact variety for growing in containers. The fruits are early to mature and lavender-coloured with white stripes.

'LITTLE FINGERS'
Produces masses of finger-sized fruits with a mild, sweet flavour on compact plants.

'MELANZANA VIOLETTA DI FIRENZE'
This lovely Italian variety bears large, ribbed, oval fruits with an excellent flavour.

'MONEYMAKER'
Early-maturing with good yields of long, elegant, dark-coloured fruit. It also tolerates lower temperatures.

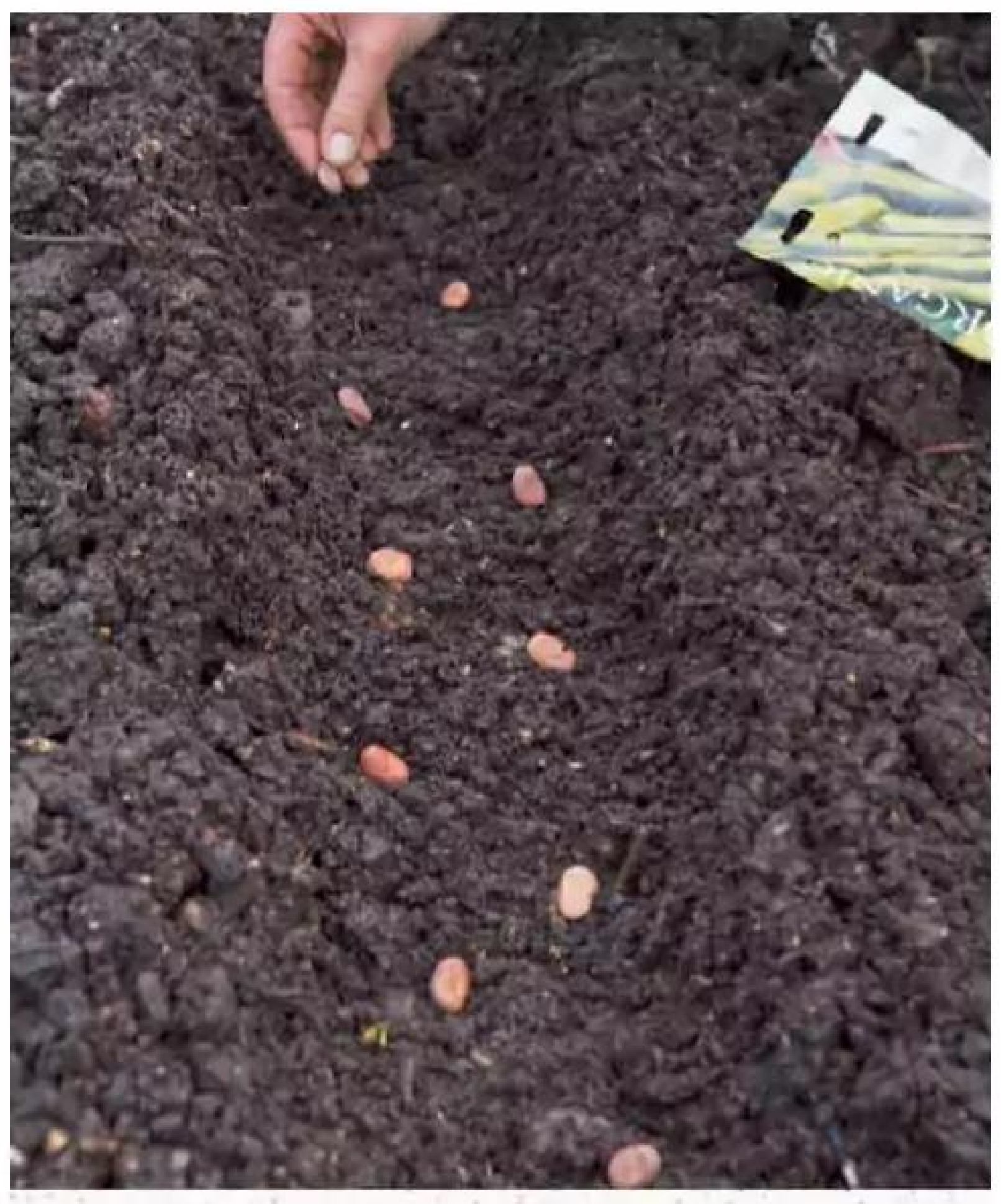
Beans, broad

Home-grown broad beans bear little resemblance to the ones you buy in shops. They're tasty, with no hint of bitterness, and wonderfully tender, not at all like shoe leather! Freshly picked and eaten young, they're a revelation.

	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
SOW	●	●	●	●						●	●	
PLANT				●	●							
HARVEST					●	●	●	●				

SPACING 5cm deep, 20cm apart, 20cm between rows

AVG. YIELD 3kg per 3m row



Sowing and planting

Certain hardy varieties can be sown in autumn and will be ready for harvesting in seven to eight months. Spring-sown plants develop more quickly and will crop within about four months. Spring sowing is generally more reliable, especially in heavy clay soil, resulting in fewer losses than with autumn sowings.

- Before sowing, fork plenty of compost or manure into the planting area, then rake the surface to a fine texture.
- Mark out 5cm deep drills, with about 20cm between each, or sow as double rows 20cm apart. The seeds are large, so they're very easy to sow. Simply space them about 20cm apart along the length of the drill.
- Cover the seeds with soil, firm it down and water in thoroughly.

Crop care

Cover the newly sown area with netting to protect the seeds from hungry birds and squirrels. Seedlings should appear in a few weeks, depending on the weather and soil conditions. Keep the plants well watered and free of weeds.

Harvesting

If you want to eat broad beans in their pods, harvest them really young (when they're about 6cm long) before they have the chance to become tough or bitter. To eat them shelled, wait a little longer, until the pods are clearly bulging with beans. After harvesting, leave the plants in the ground for as long as possible. Like other legumes, broad beans have nitrogen-fixing bacteria in the nodules on their root system that boost nitrogen levels in the soil. The crops you grow in this area the following year will reap the benefits.

Storage

Prepare broad beans for freezing by blanching in boiling water for three minutes then plunging into a bowl of cold water to stop the cooking process, then freeze immediately.

Troubleshooting

Watch out for blackfly, which multiply into dense colonies on the soft, young shoot tips. To prevent this, pinch out the tender shoot tips once the first flowers appear.

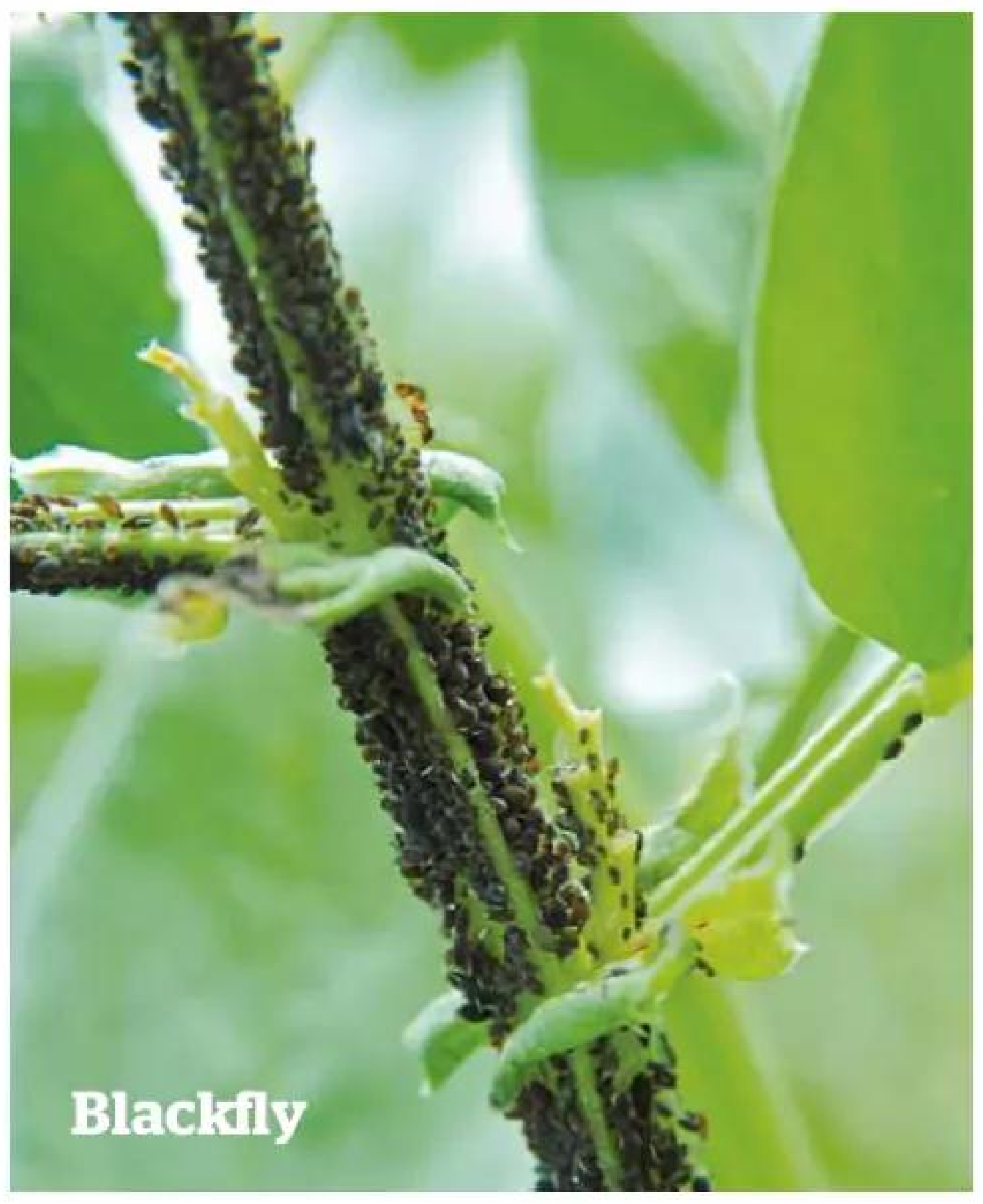
'Imperial Green Longpod'

TOP TIP

To avoid having to use supporting canes, grow plants close together or in double rows. With just 20cm between them, even taller varieties provide mutual support.

Preparation and uses

The pods can be eaten whole like mangetout when young, or the beans can be left to mature inside the pods. For a better flavour, squeeze mature beans through their inner casing.



Blackfly

5 TO TRY...

'AQUADULCE CLAUDIA'
Very hardy, so this variety is perfect for autumn sowing.

'BUNYARD'S EXHIBITION'
Sweet and subtly flavoured with a delicate texture; heavy cropper.

'IMPERIAL GREEN LONGPOD'
Succulent flavour and produces a high yield.

'STEREO'
The beans have tender skins and are good as a mangetout-type crop if picked young.

'THE SUTTON'
This is a dwarf variety, so it's a good option for an exposed, windy site.

Beans, French

French beans give you two crops for the price of one: enjoy the pods when they're young, or leave to dry on the plant for use as haricot beans. Easy to grow as climbers, and with excellent dwarf varieties that are suitable for growing in pots.

	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
SOW				●	●	●	●					
PLANT OUT					●	●						
HARVEST							●	●	●	●		

SPACING 5cm deep, 15cm apart, 45cm between rows

AVG. YIELD 4.5kg per 3m row

Sowing and planting

- French beans need sun, shelter and a fertile, moisture-retentive soil. They don't do well on heavy clay, so dig in plenty of well-rotted organic matter such as garden compost before planting. As a tender crop, they need to be sown indoors from April, then planted outside after the last frost, usually in late May or early June.
- For a supply of beans through to autumn, keep sowing every three weeks until early summer. Later sowings can be made outdoors, but seedlings need to be covered with a cloche to keep them warm.
- Dwarf French beans planted 15cm apart won't need to be staked.
- Climbing French beans look particularly attractive grown with sweet peas on a wigwam of canes in the flower border.

Crop care

For a good crop of beans, water plants regularly, especially while they're flowering. Maintain the moisture in the soil around the roots by applying a mulch of garden compost.

Harvesting

For delicious, tender beans, pick them as soon as they are large enough to eat (after 10-12 weeks). Snip them off with scissors. Regular picking encourages the plants to produce more beans.

Storage

If you don't want to eat the whole crop straight away, blanch beans in boiling water for two minutes, cool, then freeze immediately.

Troubleshooting

Slugs love to eat young plants, so deter them with crushed eggshells, or apply nematodes.

Preparation and uses

Never eat raw pods. To prepare them, top and tail the pods, then lightly steam them and serve with a knob of butter. You can also add cooked beans to salads. Dried beans must be soaked for at least five hours, then briskly boiled for 10 minutes and simmered for a further hour or so before being added to soups and casseroles.

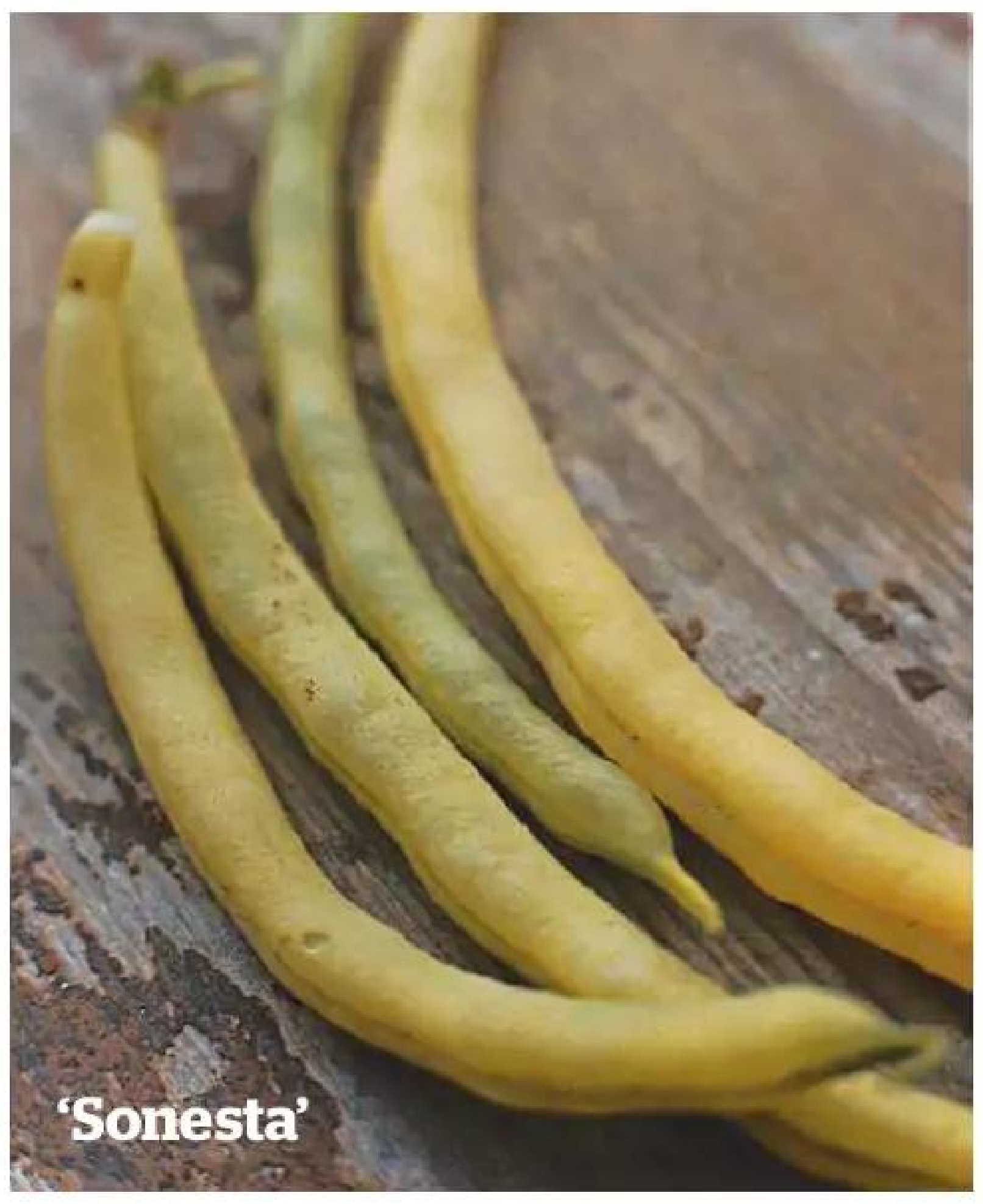
TOP TIP

Dry beans by leaving the pods on the plant to dry naturally. Or, if the weather turns damp, dig up the whole plant and hang it upside down in an airy place to dry.

'Purple Teepee'

Dwarf French beans

'Borlotto Lingua di Fuoco Nano'



'Sonesta'

5 TO TRY...

DWARF BEANS

'BORLOTTO'

Colourful mature pods that are ideal for drying. The beans have a pleasant texture and flavour.

'PURPLE TEEPEE'

Abundant harvests of eye-catching tender purple pods up to 15cm long.

'SONESTA'

These stringless, pretty yellow beans grow up to 13cm long.

CLIMBING BEANS

'BORLOTTO LINGUA DI FUOCO NANO'

An Italian variety with spectacular pods splashed with red.

'HUNTER'

Large crops of stringless, flat pods up to 20cm long with good disease resistance.

Beans, runner

Decorative and productive, runner beans are one of those sow-and-watch-it-grow crops. When picked young, they have a great flavour, texture and succulence – so different from the stringy 'wooden' beans you find in the shops. They're also pretty enough to grow as an annual climber in the flower border.

	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
SOW				●	●	●						
PLANT OUT					●	●	●					
HARVEST							●	●	●	●		

SPACING 5cm deep, 20cm apart, 60cm between rows

AVG. YIELD 6kg per 3m row

'Celebration'

'White Lady'

Sowing and planting

- Runner beans need a sunny spot in rich, moisture-retentive soil with plenty of well-rotted compost or manure added to it. Ideally, you'll have done this the previous winter – but, if not, you can get away with digging it in just before you start planting.
- By sowing indoors in April (into deep pots), you'll get better germination and earlier harvests. The seedlings will also be out of reach of slugs. Well-developed seedlings can be planted out after the last frost, usually around late May. You can make later sowings directly outside in May and June, but these won't start cropping until July or August.
- If space is limited, grow runner beans in containers for an attractive and edible display – try 'Painted Lady', with its pretty red and white flowers. Add a wigwam of canes for support.

- When growing in pots, it's especially important to keep plants well watered. Choose the largest container possible to help stop the compost drying out too quickly. Add a thick layer of mulch to the compost surface to hold in moisture, and on hot days move the pot out of direct sun if possible.

'Painted Lady'

Crop care

Runner beans are vigorous and need sturdy supports (see tip on how to make a bean wigwam). When they reach the top of their canes, pinch out the growing tips to stop them getting overly tall.

Beans are thirsty plants, so water them regularly, especially when they're in flower, and mulch the soil surface to hold in moisture.

Harvesting

Runner beans are ready to pick after 12 to 16 weeks. At 15-20cm long, the pods will be at their most tender without being stringy. Regular picking encourages more beans.

Storage

Runner beans freeze well. Top and tail them and remove any 'string'. Slice the beans into short lengths, blanch in boiling water for two minutes, then drain, cool, pop into plastic bags and freeze.

Troubleshooting

Place copper rings around the stems of young plants or cover the soil with crushed eggshells or other similar dry, gritty material to deter slugs and snails.

Preparation and uses

Runner beans are delicious lightly steamed with a knob of butter. Cold, cooked beans are also good in salads. Never eat raw beans.

TOP TIP

To make a bean wigwam, take five canes up to 3m. Push the end of each one firmly into the soil in an even circle. Tie all the tops of the canes together and plant at the base.

5 TO TRY...

'ARMSTRONG'
Heavy crops of long, string-free pods with great flavour. Crops early.

'CELEBRATION'
Pretty pink flowers are followed by lots of straight, tender, great-tasting pods.

'LADY DI'
A generous cropper with long, slender, stringless pods. This variety is tolerant of hot weather.

'PAINTED LADY'
An old favourite, with attractive red and white flowers and plentiful, well-flavoured beans. Less vigorous than many modern varieties.

'WHITE LADY'
Pure white flowers and long, stringless pods with white seeds. Very bee-friendly.

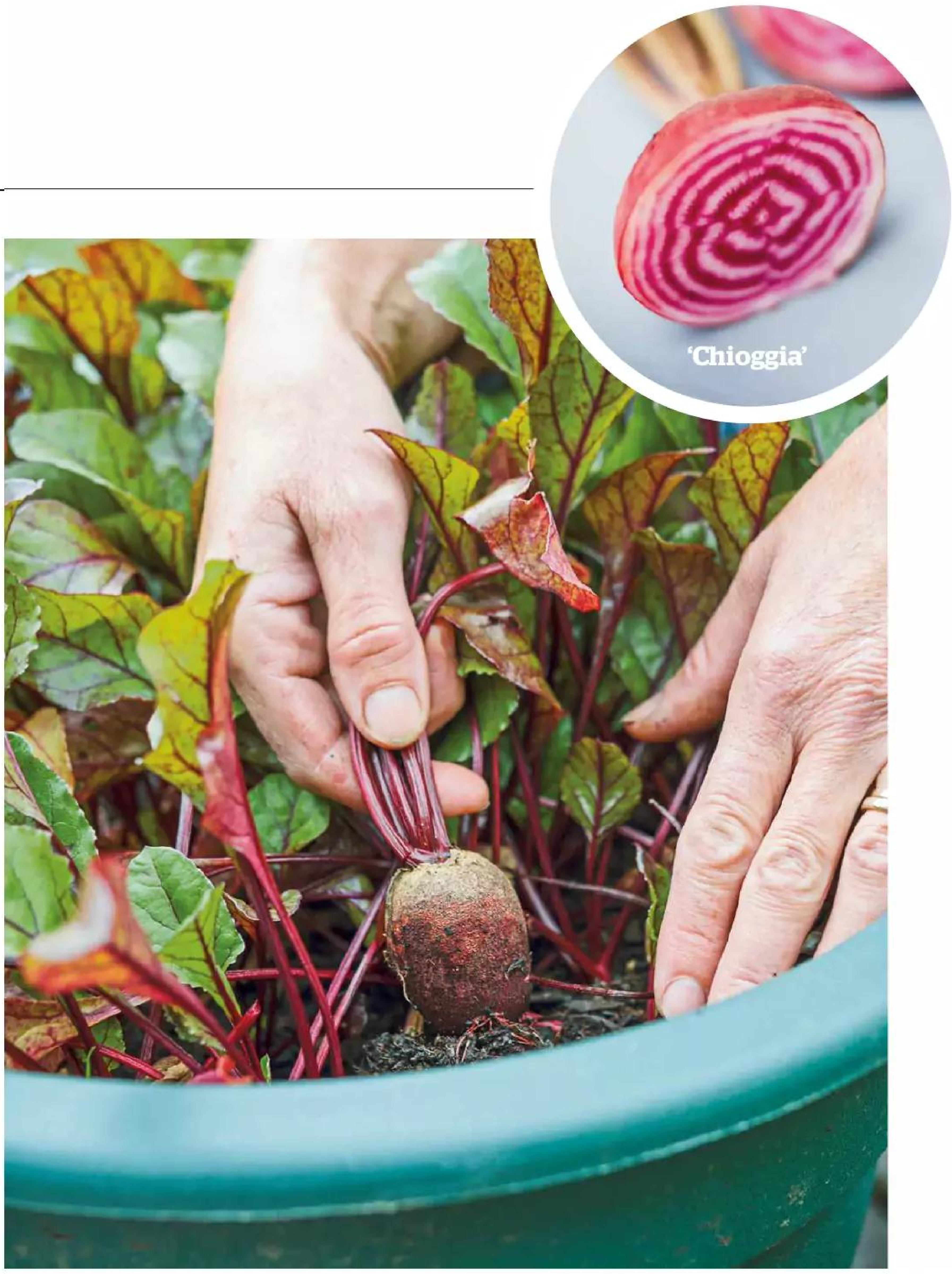
Beetroot

Everyone knows the round red roots of beetroot, but this crop is also available in a range of colours and flavours. As long as you can deter slugs and snails, it's easy to grow and stores well for many months. Plus, the young leaves make a tasty addition to salads or can be steamed, as spinach.

	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
SOW			●	●	●	●	●					
HARVEST						●	●	●	●	●		

SPACING 1cm deep, 10cm apart, 30cm between rows

AVG. YIELD 5-8kg per 3m row



'Chioggia'

Sowing and planting

- Sow seeds outdoors from mid-April to July in a 1cm deep drill. Space seeds 10cm apart, with 30cm between rows. As beetroot is a root crop, it does best if the soil is free of large stones, and prefers light to heavy soil.
- If you want an early crop, choose a variety resistant to bolting and sow under cloches from the beginning of March.
- It's worth 'station sowing' seeds for a good crop. This means sowing two seeds at each point along the row and thinning later to one seedling. The thinnings are delicious in salads. Label the row, then water along its length.
- Beetroot also grows well in large pots of sifted garden soil or soil-based compost such such as John Innes No.2.

Crop care

Water plants regularly for a bigger crop, less tendency towards woodiness and to help prevent the roots splitting. Hand weed regularly, instead of hoeing, to keep the row weed-free and avoid damaging the crop's roots.

Harvesting

Growing different varieties of beetroot allows you to enjoy the crop over a long period, without having to store it. Most of the globe types are ready to harvest in 10-12 weeks; the longer cylindrical varieties take nearer 20 weeks. When harvesting, grasp the foliage firmly where it meets the top of the root and pull. The younger roots are more tender, so aim to harvest too early rather than too late – the roots should be the size of a cricket ball or smaller. After harvesting, twist off the foliage about 5cm from the base, leaving short stalks.

Storage

Store only undamaged roots. Pack them into a box filled with compost and place in a cool shed. They should last right through until March.

Troubleshooting

Slugs and snails are the only real problem, with seedlings being eaten at the base as they emerge. Apply biological-control nematodes or grow the crop in a large container or bag of clean soil or compost, out of reach of those pesky molluscs. A barrier of crushed eggshells may reduce losses.

Preparation and uses

Wash gently in cold water, leaving the root in place and taking care not to pierce the skin – this prevents 'bleeding' during cooking. Beetroot can be boiled for one to two hours, depending on age, then drained and peeled, or try it wrapped in foil and baked in a low oven for around two hours. It's delicious with cold meats or in salads with goats' cheese.

5 TO TRY...

'BLANKOMA'
A white-skinned variety, the roots are round to conical and earthy in flavour, with strong, tall green tops that may be used as spinach.

'BOLTARDY'
Very popular variety with an excellent sweet flavour. It is resistant to bolting, so it can be sown earlier than many other varieties.

'CHIOGGIA'
Striped red and white flesh that's sweet and tender. The dark green leaves and red stems can be used in salads.

'KESTREL'
Has a high sugar content and dark red flesh. Perfect for baby beets or left to mature without going 'woody'. Good resistance to bolting.

'RED ACE'
Dark red, round or oval roots with a good flavour. Growth is strong, making plants more tolerant of dry, sandy soils.

TOP TIP

Juice raw beetroot mixed with carrot juice for a refreshing, nutrient-rich drink.

Broccoli

Broccoli is great steamed and added to salads and stir-fries. Full of vitamins and iron, it is a delicious, healthy vegetable. If you choose the right varieties, and time your seed-sowing well, you can keep harvesting broccoli from autumn through to spring the following year.

	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
SOW			●	●	●	●						
PLANT OUT					●	●	●	●				
HARVEST	●	●	●	●			●	●	●	●		

SPACING 2cm deep, 30cm apart, 45cm between rows

AVG. YIELD 1.5kg per 3m row

'Early Purple Sprouting'

Sowing and planting

- You can start sowing seeds in modules in late winter if you have a greenhouse. From early spring to mid-summer, sow outdoors every six weeks or so for a regular crop.
- Sow two seeds per pot or module. Thin to one when the seedlings have appeared and keep watering and feeding until the plants have four or five leaves, then plant out.
- Use traditional crop rotation methods. Plant out seedlings in beds where you previously grew beans. The soil will be much improved by the nitrogen-fixing properties of the legume family, which is great for healthy leaf growth.

Crop care

Broccoli prefers to be grown in full sun in free-draining alkaline soil. Add garden lime or mushroom compost to prepared beds where you are going to plant out the seedlings. Water regularly as the plants do not like to dry out, and feed with a high-nitrogen fertiliser every couple of weeks.

Harvesting

Depending on the variety, you can start cutting heads 12-16 weeks after sowing. Cut the main central one first, then continue cutting sideshoots regularly over the following four to six weeks.

Storage

To make the most of its vitamins and minerals, broccoli is best eaten soon after picking. It can also be frozen: blanch in boiling water for two minutes, then drain, cool, pop into plastic bags and freeze immediately.

Preparation and uses

Broccoli is best steamed or lightly blanched. It can be used in stir-fries, salads and pasta.

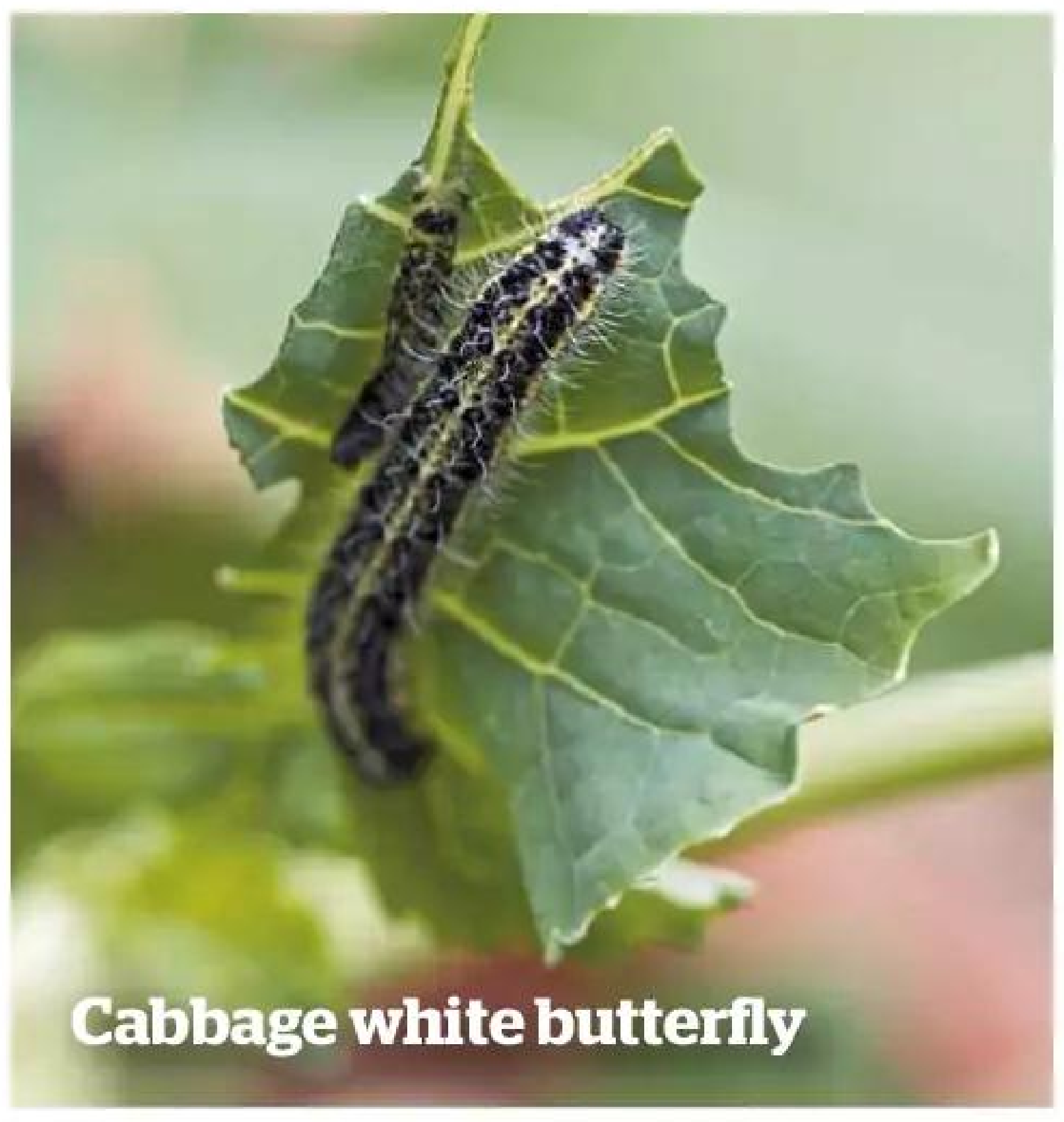
Troubleshooting

Broccoli is prone to many of the problems that commonly affect plants in the brassica family. Birds can demolish crops by eating young plants, so use bird scarers and net your crops.

The caterpillars of the cabbage white butterfly can cause a lot of damage, making holes in the leaves and eating into the heart of the plants. Pick caterpillars off by hand or use insect-proof netting.

Cabbage root fly lays eggs on brassica plants – the small white larvae feed, stunting growth and causing plants to wilt and die. The best defence is to use insect-proof mesh or fleece.

Club root is a soil-borne disease occurring mostly in the warmer months. It infects the roots, causing them to become swollen, affecting the growth of the plants above ground. Improving drainage can help, as can adding lime to make the soil more alkaline. If your plants are affected by club root, don't grow brassicas in the same spot again.



Cabbage white butterfly

5 TO TRY...

'BELSTAR' RHS AGM
Small, domed heads with good flavour, this produces lots of sideshoots when the main head is cut.

'BROKALI APOLLO'
This cross between broccoli and Chinese kale has tender stems, similar to those of sprouting broccoli.

'EARLY PURPLE SPROUTING'
Very hardy variety that's tasty and nutritious and the leaves are also edible.

'EARLY WHITE SPROUTING'
This type of broccoli has a slightly milder flavour than the purple or green varieties.

'GREEN MAGIC' RHS AGM
An early-maturing variety with a good flavour and resistance to rust.

'Brokali Apollo'

'Green Magic' is early-maturing and rust-resistant

Cabbages

Shredded in salads, added to stir-fries or mixed into soups, cabbages have a wide range of uses. They also have the great advantage of being available almost all year round, thanks to the many types that can be grown – from leafy spring varieties to dense, hearting winter ones.

	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
SOW			●	●	●	●	●	●				
PLANT OUT				●	●	●	●	●	●	●		
HARVEST	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●

SPACING 2cm deep, 25-45cm apart, 30-60cm between rows

AVG. YIELD 10kg per 3m row

Spring cabbage

Autumn cabbage

Sowing and planting

- Cabbages can be sown all year and like a sunny spot and moist soil with plenty of well-rotted organic matter. Ideally, work this into the soil the previous autumn.
- Sow seeds indoors 2cm deep in pots or trays and place on a sunny windowsill. After about five weeks, plant the young cabbages outdoors.
- Spacing varies: grow **spring cabbages** 25cm apart, with 30cm between rows; **summer cabbages** 38cm apart, with 30cm between rows; **autumn cabbages** 45cm apart, with 45cm between rows; and **winter cabbages**, 45cm apart, with 60cm between rows.
- Club root is a soil-borne infection that distorts the roots and inhibits growth. It thrives in acidic soil, so check your soil's pH by doing a pH test. If your soil is acidic, add lime to neutralise it.

Crop care

Keep plants well watered and never let the soil dry out – don't let it get waterlogged either.

Harvesting

Harvest cabbage using a sharp knife – see the seed packet for when to do so for your chosen variety. Leave a 10cm stalk, then cut a cross in the top and it will produce a much smaller cabbage or two.

Storage

Cabbages are best eaten as soon as they're picked, but winter and red cabbages can be stored in a cold place.

Troubleshooting

The plants are easy to care for, but watch out for pigeons and the caterpillars of cabbage white butterflies. Cover plants with netting and string up some old CDs to scare away hungry birds.

Preparation and uses

Discard any floppy outer leaves and cut out the tough central stalks. Wash well, then shred and use raw in salads and coleslaw, pickled as sauerkraut and braised or steamed as a side dish with a knob of butter. Don't boil cabbage to death, as it will produce a bitter taste and smell. Save the cooking water, which is full of vitamins, minerals and flavour, to make a nutritious soup or gravy.

TOP TIP

Cabbages are a magnet for birds, which feast on the foliage, as do the caterpillars of the cabbage white butterfly. Protect them with netting or fine mesh.

5 TO TRY...

Cabbage varieties are grouped according to when they're ready to harvest:

- **Spring cabbages (sown in late summer) produce loose leaves or conical heads.**
- **Summer cabbages (sown in early spring) have large, round heads.**
- **Autumn cabbages (sown in late spring) also have large, round heads.**
- **Winter cabbages (sown in spring) include crinkly Savoy.**

'DUNCAN'
Pointed-heart spring cabbage.

'EARLIEST OF ALL'
Compact, pale green heads, ready for picking from July.

'LANGEDIJK'
Tender autumn/winter variety with a white heart.

'PRIMERO'
Black-purple summer variety.

'SAVOY KING'
Hardy autumn/winter cabbage.

Carrots

You may be able to buy them from greengrocers and supermarkets at low prices throughout the year, but if you want carrots with plenty of flavour, it's worth growing your own. Apart from the classic-shaped orange root, there is a wide selection of varieties available in an array of unexpected colours.

	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
SOW	●	●	●	●	●	●	●					
HARVEST					●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●

SPACING 1cm deep, 5-8cm apart, 30cm between rows

AVG. YIELD 3-4kg per 3m row

'Purple Haze'

Sowing and planting

- There are generally two types of carrot: early varieties that are sown in spring and ready to pick about 10 weeks later, and late varieties that are sown from the end of spring and are ready to lift in about 14-16 weeks.
- The main sowing season is late March to June, but earlier and later sowings are worth it if you can protect them with fleece or a cloche.
- Good soil preparation is essential. Fork it thoroughly to break up lumps and remove as many stones as possible. Carrots prefer a light, free-draining but moisture-retentive soil, so it's worth adding some well-rotted organic matter.
- Carrots are best sown directly into the ground. Using the edge of a hoe or trowel, make a seed drill about 1cm deep. Sow the seeds thinly along the bottom of the drill, spacing them about 5-8cm apart. Cover with soil and water well using a watering can with a rose attached.
- To extend your cropping period, sow the seeds successionally at two-week intervals. You can also sow a selection of varieties to crop at different times over the season.

Crop care

Carrots don't need too much care. Aim to keep the soil around them weed-free, although once they start to grow strongly their foliage will usually shade out most weeds. Water occasionally. Thinning out seedlings not only wastes time, it can also attract destructive carrot fly. These pests detect the smell of crushed foliage when you pull up carrots, so sow your seeds thinly to avoid having to handle the young plants.

Harvesting

Lift carrots when the soil is moist, or water beforehand to prevent the roots breaking when you pull them up. Water the soil again to settle it around the remaining roots.

Storage

Carrots keep for months in dry sand. First, spread a layer of sand in a box then put them in, making sure they don't touch each other. Cover with another layer of sand and store in a cool, dry place.

TOP TIP

You can still produce an excellent crop by sowing seeds in a 30-45cm deep pot. Fill with sifted garden soil or soil-based compost such as John Innes No.2.

'Parmex'

Troubleshooting

Carrot fly is the most common and serious problem. The fly's maggots eat tunnels through the carrots, ruining the crop. Choose resistant varieties such as 'Resistafly', 'Flyaway' or 'Maestro'. Alternatively, place a 45cm-high fine-mesh barrier around your crops, or cover with fleece or a similar material. Alternating a row of carrots with a row of onions or garlic may help to mask their smell.

Preparation and uses

Carrots are delicious steamed, boiled or roasted; they can also be grated fresh in salads.

5 TO TRY...

'AMSTERDAM FORCING 3'
This variety produces short, cylindrical roots.

'AUTUMN KING 2'
A classic late-maturing orange variety.

'PARMEX'
Round-rooted, perfect for growing in pots.

'PURPLE HAZE'
Dark purple skin surrounds the orange flesh.

'ST VALERY'
High-yielding; great flavour.

Celeriac

It may be a humble vegetable, but there are lots of benefits to growing this large, swollen root. It makes a good alternative to celery, which can be trickier to grow, and its flavoursome root can be used in a variety of culinary ways, including soup or as a partner to potato in dauphinoise.

	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
SOW			●	●								
PLANT OUT						●						
HARVEST	●	●	●							●	●	●

SPACING 1cm deep, 30cm apart, 45cm between rows, 1 large root per plant

AVG. YIELD 10 heads per 3m row

Sowing and planting

- Celeriac seeds can be hard to germinate. You can start them early in a heated propagator, or in mid-spring under cloches or in an unheated greenhouse.
- Sow into trays or modules and move to pots when the seedlings are big enough to handle but keep protected until all risk of frost has passed. A cold snap can cause plants to bolt prematurely, which means they won't form the roots.

Crop care

Celeriac is a moisture-loving plant and requires a rich, moisture-retentive soil in full sun – the soil should never be allowed to dry out. As the plants mature, remove the outer leaves to expose the crown of the root and allow it to develop.

Harvesting

Harvest celeriac roots from October to March – the longer they stay in the soil, the stronger the flavour. Use a fork to gently lift each root.

Storage

You can leave the roots in the ground until you need them, including into autumn and winter.

Troubleshooting

Celeriac is hardier and more disease resistant than celery. The seedlings may be prone to slug attacks, so protect them. Celery leaf mining fly is the most common pest. It causes blisters on the leaves and can be dealt with by removing the leaves and burning them. Protect plants by growing under a fine net.

Preparation and uses

Peel and chop up the bulb in soups and salads, or to flavour mashed and other potato dishes. The leaves have a much stronger flavour and can be used fresh in salads or dried to add celery-flavoured seasoning to many recipes.

'Prinz'

TOP TIP

Keep plants well mulched to help absorb as much water as possible. A weekly feed of liquid seaweed can be beneficial.

5 TO TRY...

'ALABASTER'
This is high-yielding variety with good resistance to bolting. It also has a very good flavour.

'BRILLIANT'
An early variety with smooth roots and tasty white flesh that doesn't discolour once it is peeled, unlike others.

'GIANT PRAGUE'
An heirloom celeriac that matures late in the season. It has an excellent flavour and stores well.

'MONARCH'
This is a smooth-skinned variety, which makes it easier to peel. It has an AGM and is rated for its flavour.

'PRINZ'
Trouble-free, compact celeriac with an AGM. It has a good flavour and is less prone to bolting than others.

Chicory

Many people find the leaves bitter, but chicory is easy to look after and has a long growing season. There are three types: 'forcing' chicory, grown for plump hearts that are good for blanching; red chicory or radicchio, which is great for colourful salads; and 'non-forcing' or sugar loaf chicory that can be cooked in a variety of ways or eaten raw. Chicory varieties are either perennial or biennial, and will tolerate a range of climates and soil types.

	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
SOW			●	●	●	●	●	●				
PLANT OUT					●	●						
HARVEST							●	●	●	●	●	●

SPACING 1.5cm deep, 30cm apart, 30cm between rows

AVG. YIELD 8-9 heads per 3m row

Sowing and planting

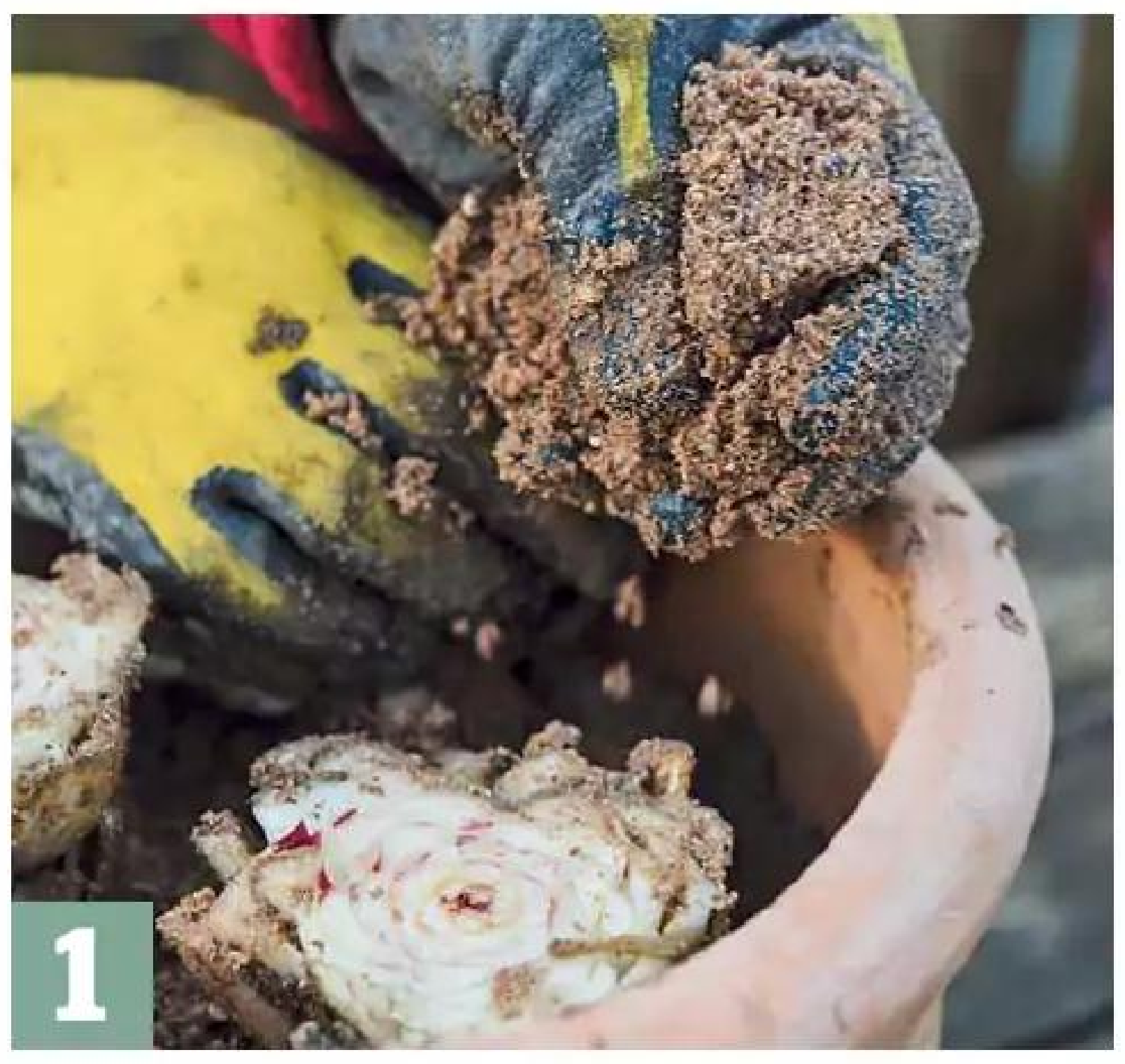
Start in March, sowing seeds into modules to grow on in a greenhouse. Or sow 'radicchio' types outdoors into well-prepared soil from late spring through the summer. Sow seeds 1.5cm deep and either broadcast sow (scatter seeds thinly over an area) or in rows 30cm apart and thin seedlings later.

Crop care

Chicory generally thrives in free-draining soil in full sun to partial shade. Thin out the seedlings to 25-30cm apart between plants and keep weed-free. Protect young plants in autumn to extend the growing season.

1 For 'forcing' varieties, lift the roots in November, throwing away the smaller ones. Cut back the leaves to 2.5cm and pack the roots horizontally in sand. Store them in a cool shed until needed.

2 To produce 'chicons' (leafy heads), plant a few roots in a medium-sized pot of moist compost with the tops just above the soil. Cover with a black polythene bag or another pot and keep at 10-15°C (50-59°F).



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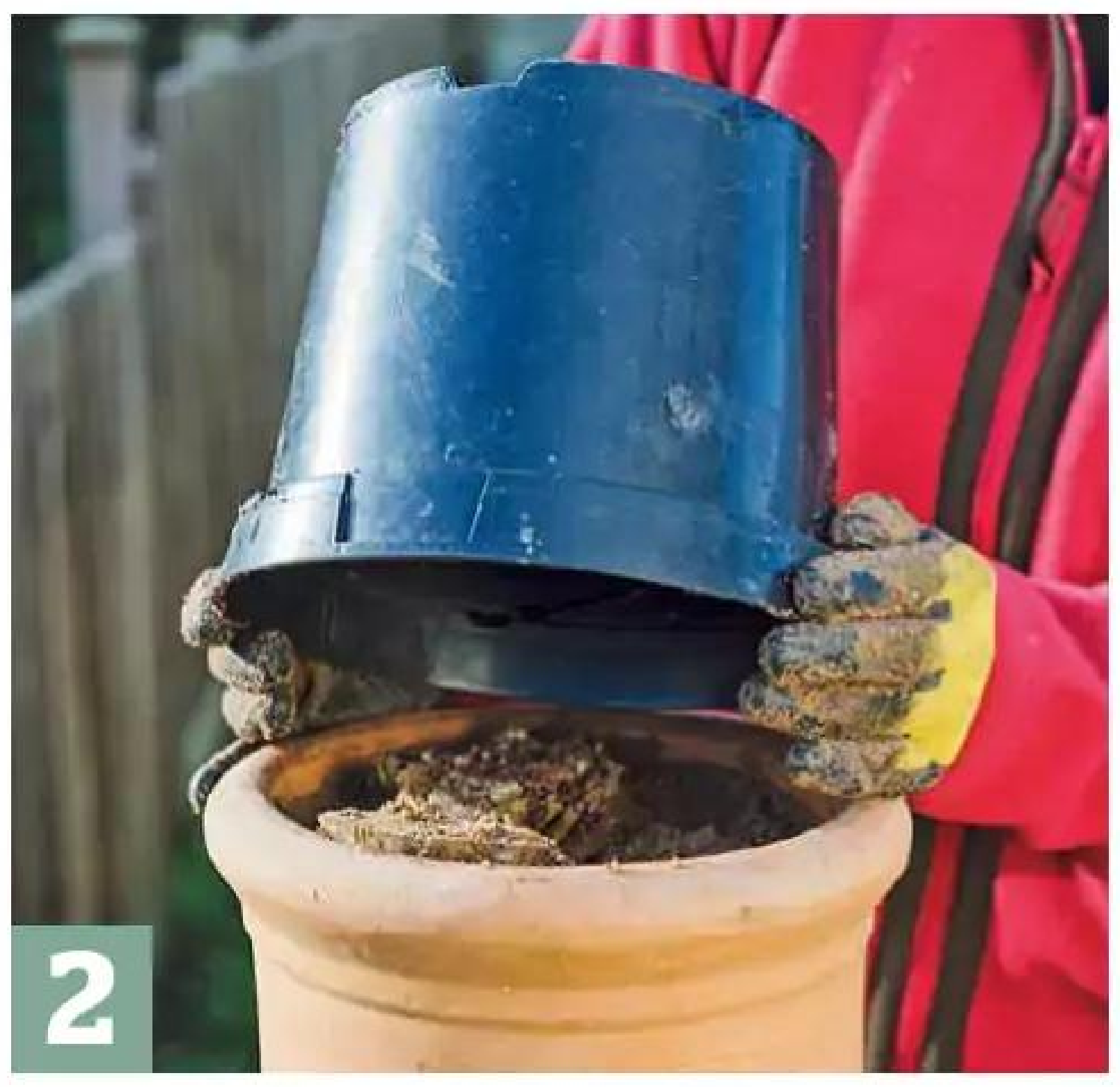

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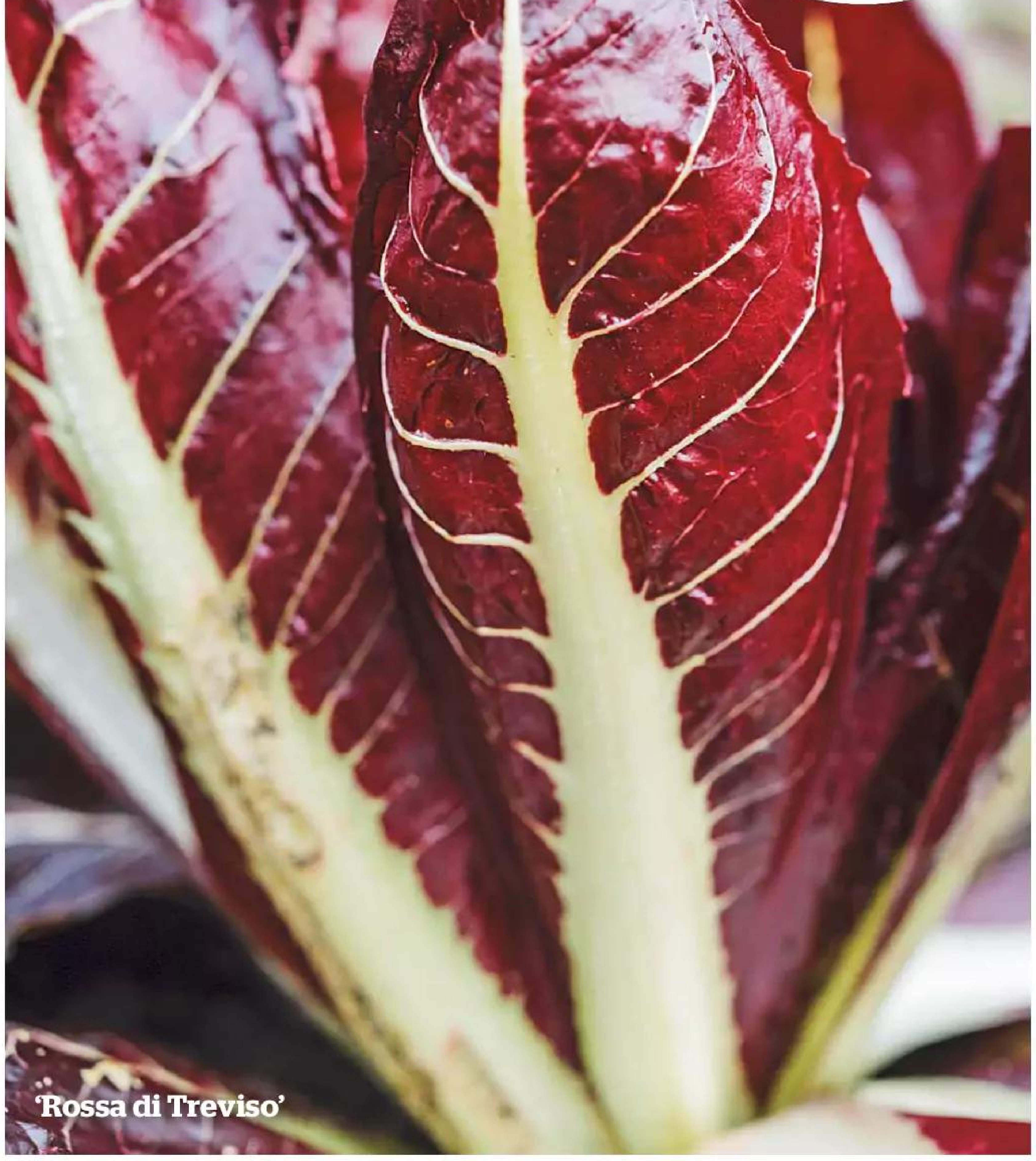
'Palla Rossa'



'Rossa di Treviso'

Harvesting

'Non-forcing chicory' can be cut from late summer until October. Look for fully formed hearts and cut them to just above soil level. The stumps will resprout if left so you can harvest more leaves later.

If you're growing 'forcing' types, the 'chicons' are ready to harvest after about four weeks under cover, when they're about 15cm high.

Storage

Plants can be pulled up by their roots and will keep for a few weeks in a fridge. Or store in a cool shed, protected against frost with straw.

Troubleshooting

Chicory is relatively free from pests and diseases.

Preparation and uses

Use the leaves raw in salads, or roast white chicory for a tasty vegetable accompaniment.

5 TO TRY...

'KRISTALKOPF SNOWFLAKE'
A 'non-forcing' chicory, producing heads of crispy leaves with a soft heart.

'PALLA ROSSA' RHS AGM
This 'non-forcing' variety has maroon leaves, prominent white veining and a firm heart. It does not bolt.

'PAN DI ZUCCHERO' RHS AGM
A sugar loaf variety with dark green outer leaves. Good for blanching the hearts.

'ROSSA DI TREVISO'
This tall-growing 'non-forcing' chicory has maroon and white leaves with thick, pure white stems.

'WITLOOF DE BRUSSELS'
A 'forcing' variety, related to dandelions, so therefore not fussy about soil – in fact, it prefers not to have added compost or manure.

Courgettes

Easy to grow in a warm, sunny spot, courgettes are highly productive. So unless you have an unusually large number of mouths to feed, just two or three plants should be enough.

	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
SOW				●	●	●						
PLANT OUT					●	●						
HARVEST							●	●	●	●		

SPACING 2.5cm deep, 90cm apart, 90cm between rows

AVG. YIELD 4.5kg per 3m row

Sowing and planting

- For early crops, sow seeds indoors in mid-spring into pots or module trays filled with multi-purpose compost. For later crops, sow seeds outside in late spring.
- When seedlings appear, pot them on into larger pots. Grow on indoors until ready to plant outside in late spring, after the last frost. Space plants 90cm apart, then generously mulch the soil to hold in moisture.
- If you don't have the time or space to sow seeds indoors, buy ready-grown plants from garden centres in late spring.

Crop care

Plenty of moisture is the key to success. A constantly just-moist soil is essential if plants are to crop to their full potential, so water regularly and apply a thick layer of mulch to hold water in the soil. In dry conditions, most varieties produce mainly non-fruiting male flowers. To encourage female flowers, which are the ones that produce fruit, water generously and regularly. Apply tomato fertiliser once a fortnight to promote growth and flowering.

Harvesting

Cut courgettes while they are small (about 10cm long is ideal) rather than leaving them to grow to the size of marrows – this will help to encourage more fruits.

Storage

Courgettes are best used fresh, but they can be kept for a short period by storing in a cool, dry place. Alternatively, turn any gluts into chutneys or pickles.

'Black Forest'

TOP TIP

If you're short on space, try a climbing courgette – 'Black Forest' and 'Tromboncino' are easy to train up a stake, as long as they are tied in as they grow.

'One Ball'

Troubleshooting

Rotting fruit is a common problem in damp weather. It often spreads from the faded flower into the end of the courgette itself. Never water plants from above – always direct water down onto the soil around the stem. Keep a close eye on plants during wet weather and remove any soggy flowers from the end of developing fruits.

Deter slugs by putting crushed eggshells around the stem base or use biological pest control.

Preparation and uses

Courgettes can be steamed, fried or grilled or eaten raw. The spherical varieties are perfect for stuffing then baking.

5 TO TRY...

'BLACK BEAUTY'

A popular variety with glossy dark green fruits and a delicate flavour.

'BLACK FOREST'

Prolific green courgette that is a climbing variety. Ideal for growing in containers.

'DEFENDER'

A heavy cropper with green fruits and good resistance to disease.

'ONE BALL'

Prolific producer. The vibrant yellow spherical fruits have a creamy flesh.

'VENUS'

A compact patio variety, ideal for pots. Enjoys a long season.

Cucumbers

Home-grown cucumbers taste sweet and delicious, so it's worth growing your own crop. They're perfect for adding to summer salads, or soft and alcoholic drinks, for the perfect accompaniment to alfresco dining. Choose from indoor or outdoor varieties, depending on whether you have a greenhouse.

	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
SOW			●	●	●	●						
PLANT OUT					●	●						
HARVEST							●	●	●	●		

SPACING 2.5cm deep (1cm in pots), 60cm apart, 30cm between rows

AVG. YIELD 15 fruits per plant

'Burpless Tasty Green'

'Tiffany'

Sowing and planting

- Fill small 5cm pots with compost and sow two cucumber seeds per pot and water in. The seeds need heat to germinate – at least 20°C (68°F) – so grow in a greenhouse, heated propagator or on a sunny windowsill.
- Alternatively, wait until later in the season and sow into large pots or into warm soil outdoors.

Crop care

Cucumbers need plenty of heat. If you have a greenhouse, this is ideal. Screen off a section with bubble wrap, if you can, to maximise the humidity that cucumbers love.

Only grow cucumbers outdoors when temperatures have warmed in summer. Seedlings can be planted out when they have two or three leaves. Water regularly and mulch to retain moisture, and keep the bed weed-free.

If you are growing a variety with male flowers, look out for these – they have no small fruits behind the flower – and remove them. If female flowers are pollinated, the fruit will taste bitter and be full of seed.

All cucumbers grown indoors or outdoors need support for the trailing stems. Trellis, canes or netting work well and you can tie in the stems if necessary. Water regularly and once the fruits start to appear, feed weekly with a high-potash feed.

Harvesting

Cucumbers should be ready to pick on outdoor plants from mid-summer to early autumn. Indoor cucumbers will be ready earlier. If you keep picking them, you will encourage more cucumbers to grow. Some longer varieties can be cut in half while still on the plant and left to form a callus, so that they can be used later.

Storage

Cucumbers are generally best picked fresh and used immediately. They can be stored for a few days in the fridge. Smaller cucumbers can be pickled.

Preparation and uses

Eat fresh from the plot and serve in salads, make a refeshing chilled soup, pickle them or add to a jug of Pimm's for a delicious summer drink. Cucumber goes particularly well with salmon.

Troubleshooting

Cucumber mosaic virus is spread by aphids. It is easily recognisable as the leaves develop a yellow mosaic pattern. This disease will stunt the plant growth and affect flowering and fruiting. There is no treatment, so the only course of action if you find signs of it is to destroy any infected plants. You should also avoid touching other plants to stop the disease from spreading.

Powdery mildew can appear on leaves as white powdery patches. These cause the leaves to become stunted and shrivel. It is often caused by underwatering, although there are cultivars available that are more resistant.

Whitefly can prey on greenhouse-grown cucumbers. These tiny white insects attack plants by sucking sap. The honeydew they produce leads to a black, sooty mould, affecting the healthy growth of the plant.

Red spider mite can attack greenhouse cucumbers in warmer weather. Biological controls are available, or burn the affected, rusty looking leaves.

Protect seedlings against slugs and snails with crushed eggshells.

TOP TIP

Keep humidity levels high to prevent pests on greenhouse cucumbers. Mulching plants and paths with straw after watering can help keep the atmosphere humid.

5 TO TRY...

'BELLA'

An all-female flower variety producing long 35cm fruits, this can be grown in an unheated greenhouse.

'BURPLESS TASTY GREEN'

This ridged variety can be grown indoors or outdoors. Bears 25cm cucumbers with very high vitamin levels.

'DELISTAR'

A prolific and unusual variety for the greenhouse, with thin, translucent skin, so there's no need to peel.

'MINI MUNCH' RHS AGM

This heavy-cropping, all-female flower variety produces very small but tasty 7cm fruits outdoors.

'TIFFANY'

Vigorous habit bearing slightly ribbed fruits, up to 35cm long. The juicy flesh has no bitter aftertaste.

Florence fennel

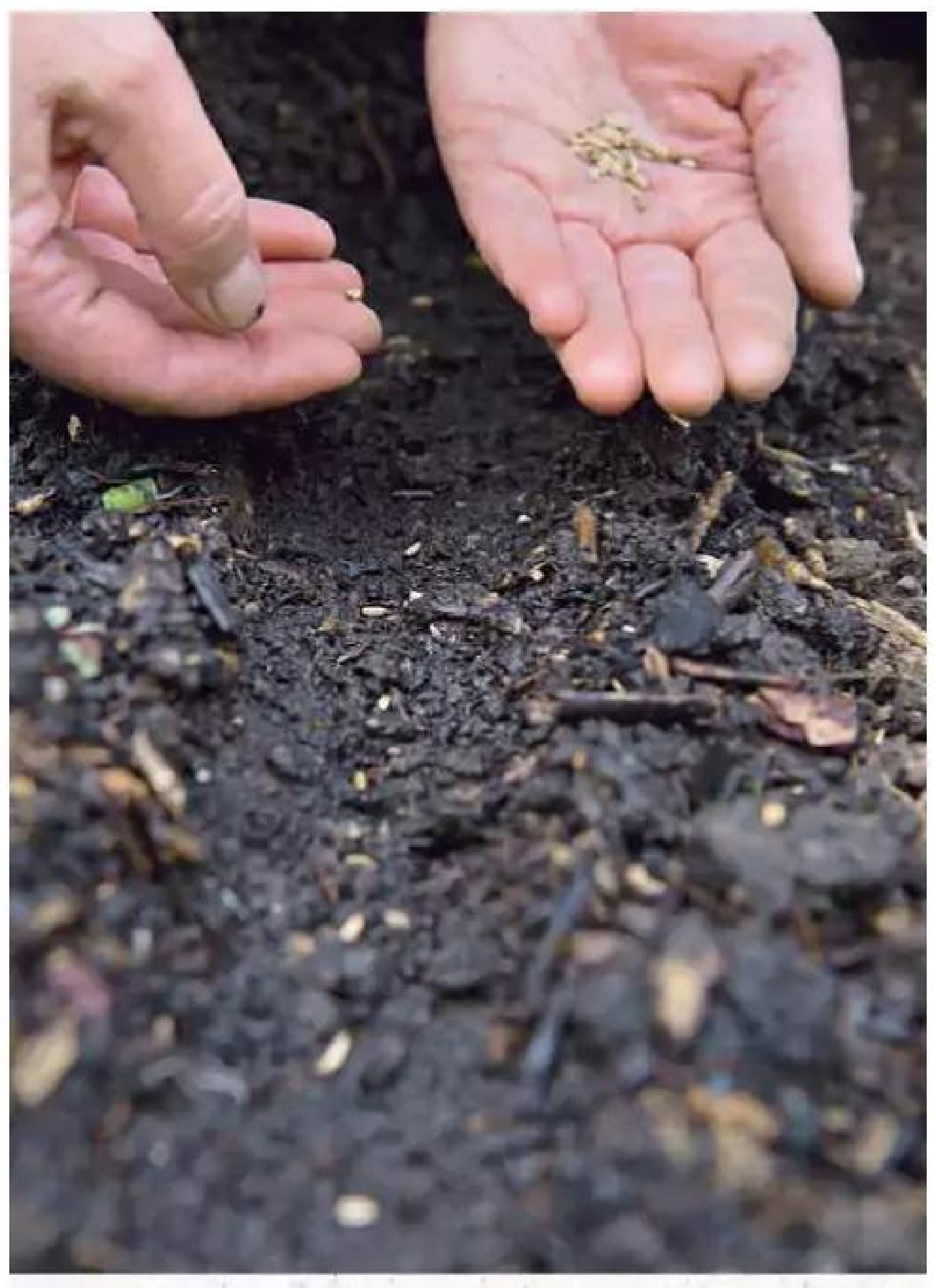
Florence fennel is the bulbous edible version of the more familiar herb, sharing the same distinctive aniseed flavour. The bulb is, in fact, the swollen base of the stem. It can be a little tricky to grow, but with the right care and attention, a home-grown crop is well worth the effort. Freshly picked fennel makes a great addition to summer salads but is also delicious cooked as an accompaniment to meat dishes, or on its own.

	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
SOW				●	●	●	●					
PLANT OUT					●	●						
HARVEST						●	●	●	●			

SPACING 1.5cm deep, 30cm apart, 30cm between rows

AVG. YIELD 1.4-2.25kg per 3m row

Both the leaves and bulbs are edible



Sowing and planting

- If you want to get an early start with Florence fennel, sow seeds into modules under cover. Sow one seed per module, as the seedlings do not like having their roots disturbed when transplanted. Water in well and keep moist.
- When the roots fill the modules, harden off the seedlings and plant them out into well-prepared and fertilised beds when there is no danger of frost.
- You can sow directly into well-prepared, warm soil later in the season. Place seeds in rows, approximately 1.5cm deep, thinning to 30cm apart.

Crop care

Florence fennel thrives in warm, sunny and moist conditions. The key to success is to prepare a bed of free-draining, fertile soil in an open site. Once your seedlings have been planted out, make sure they are watered regularly. Your plants will not be happy if they are left to dry out or if there's an unexpected frost. Any shock to the system will affect the growth of the tender edible bulbs and cause the plants to bolt, flower and set seed quite rapidly. You can earth up the bulbs as they start to swell, but this is not always necessary. Give the plants a boost every couple of weeks with a high-potash feed.

Harvesting

Florence fennel bulbs will be ready to harvest in about 10-12 weeks. Cut the bulbs above the soil, but leave the roots in the ground. They may resprout and produce a second harvest of smaller, tender shoots.

Storage

The bulbs are best eaten soon after cutting. If your plants bolted, you can still use the seeds next year.

Troubleshooting

Choose bolt-resistant varieties, like 'Perfection', as Florence fennel is very prone to bolting, particularly when sown early in the season. Protect young plants from slugs and snails by surrounding them with crushed eggshells.

Preparation and uses

Florence fennel bulbs can be served raw in salads or cooked as a vegetable accompaniment by roasting, boiling or steaming them. The leaves and stem can also be used as a seasoning for fish and in salads.

5 TO TRY...

'AMIGO' RHS AGM
This bolt-resistant variety has good, regular but slightly flatter bulbs.

'COLOSSAL'
A bolt-resistant variety that produces very large bulbs – hence the name.

'DI FIRENZE'
Quick-maturing, the large bulbs have a mild aniseed flavour.

'PERFECTION'
A good choice for early sowing, this bolt-resistant variety produces medium-sized bulbs.

'SIRIO'
Quick-maturing, this is best sown in May-June for harvesting in autumn.

Garlic

To enjoy the freshest flavour and juiciest cloves, grow your own garlic. It takes up little space and requires hardly any effort to get great crops. It simply needs a warm, sunny spot with free-draining soil that doesn't get too wet in winter.

	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
PLANT	●	●	●							●	●	●
HARVEST					●	●	●	●	●			

SPACING 5cm deep, 18cm apart, 30cm between rows

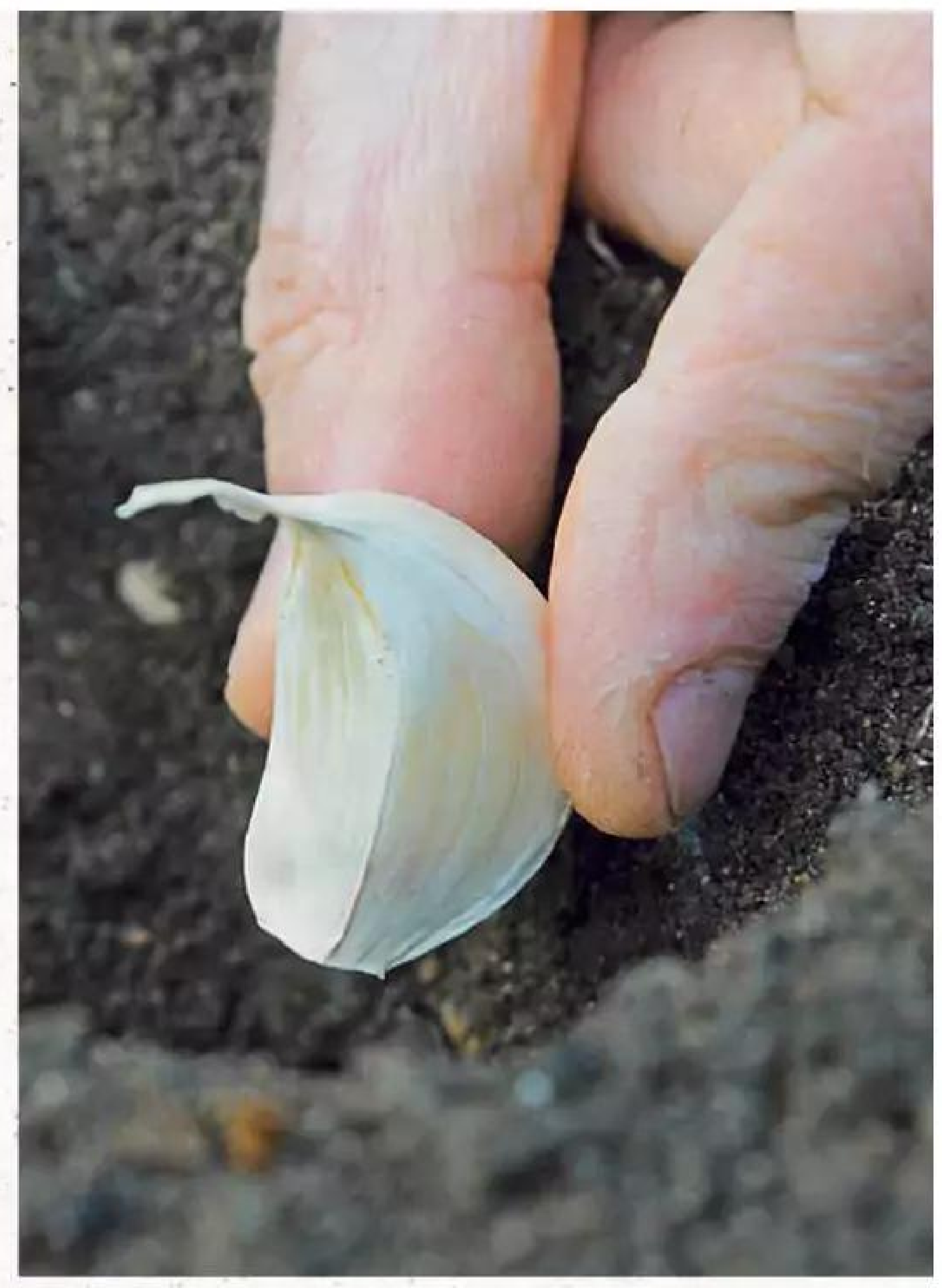
AVG. YIELD 17 bulbs per 3m row

Planting

● Garlic is available for both autumn and spring planting. To grow well, it needs a period of cold weather, so autumn planting is preferable. If you have heavy clay soil, however, it's best to wait until spring – this type of soil tends to hold a lot of water, especially over winter, which can cause the cloves to rot.

● To plant, split the bulbs into individual cloves and plant with the pointed end upwards. Take care not to damage the cloves when separating them. Space them about 18cm apart and plant at twice their own depth.

● Alternatively, start garlic off by planting cloves singly in module trays in autumn, then plant out in spring. If you have clay soil or a soil inclined to be wet in winter, grow on mounds, 15cm high and 20cm wide at the base. Plant the cloves in them, 15-20cm apart and 7-10cm deep. The results are usually great, even in very wet winters.



'Illico'

TOP TIP

An attractive way to store the bulbs is to plait them. Keep adding bulbs as you plait the stems, then hang the finished string in a cool, dry place.

Crop care

Garlic needs little care. Weed between the plants to reduce the competition for water and space. Don't panic if the plants produce flowers, because you should still get a crop – it will simply be reduced in size.

Harvesting

Garlic is ready to harvest in summer when the leaves turn yellow. In the run-up, prepare plants for harvesting by scraping away some of the surrounding soil so that sun and air can reach the bulbs and help to dry them out. After preparing, gently lift them out with a fork or trowel.

Storage

Hang the bulbs to dry in net bags (widely available online). Take care not to bruise the bulbs, as any damage can make them deteriorate in storage. Once dry, store them loose or plait their foliage to make a traditional string of bulbs (see top tip).

Troubleshooting

Garlic is generally pest-free.

Preparation and uses

Crush, slice or finely chop, or roast cloves whole, to add flavour to dishes.

5 TO TRY...

'ALBIGENSIAN WIGHT'
A heavy-cropping variety that produces large bulbs. Ideal for both autumn and spring planting.

'GERMIDOUR'
This late-maturing French variety bears purple-skinned cloves that have a mild flavour.

'IBERIAN WIGHT'
A Spanish variety that produces large, flat, white-skinned bulbs with plump cloves.

'ILLICO'
An early-maturing variety, the purple-tinged bulbs of 'Illico' have a sweet but mild flavour.

'SOLENT WIGHT'
Produces good crops of large bulbs with strongly-flavoured, plump cloves. Stores well.

'Albigensian Wight'

Kale

Easy-to-grow kale, with its superfood qualities, is a must-have in your home-grown vegetable collection. There are many varieties to choose from, some with handsome foliage that is highly ornamental, making it perfect for veg patches, borders and containers alike.

	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
SOW			●	●	●	●						
PLANT OUT					●	●	●					
HARVEST	●	●	●						●	●	●	●

SPACING 1cm deep, 45cm apart, 45cm between rows

AVG. YIELD 1.8-2.25kg per 3m row

'Dwarf Green Curled'

'Cavolo Nero'

Sowing and planting

- Seeds can be sown indoors in modules, or outdoors in warmer weather and transplanted 6-8 weeks later.
- Sow kale outdoors from March to June as a salad crop (no need to thin, just pick and eat) or from March to June for mature plants (thin out to a spacing of 45cm).
- Kale can cope with poor soil, light shade and exposed sites, but it does not like to be waterlogged.
- Pick the leaves as needed – preferably after frost for the best flavour.

Crop care

Seedlings should be planted firmly into moist but free-draining soil, in full sun to partial shade. Plants will benefit from well-composted manure added to the soil before planting. A good mulch is also helpful to keep plants moist and weed-free. Remove any flower shoots to encourage the production of plenty of healthy leaves.

Harvesting

Kale can be grown as a cut-and-come-again crop. Young tender leaves can be harvested for salads. If left to mature for winter greens, plants can be left in the ground through winter and picked as required for soups and stews.

'Curly Scarlet'

Storage

Kale leaves are best used when freshly picked. However, they can be blanched, cooled and then frozen immediately in freezer bags to enjoy later.

Troubleshooting

Another good reason for growing kale is that it is a relatively pest-free member of the brassica family. The biggest problem comes from greedy birds, so use bird scarers and net your crops.

Preparation and uses

Delicious steamed or fried, kale leaves are loaded with antioxidants and vitamins. Young kale leaves can be eaten in salads and stir-fries and they make a great addition to stews and soups. Kale can also be made into a great pesto instead of using basil.

TOP TIP

Leave a few kale plants to flower and provide a vital source of nectar and pollen for early bees.

5 TO TRY...

'BLACK TUSCANY'
Or 'Nero di Toscana', has green strap-like leaves. Good for winter or spring greens; can be grown as an ornamental plant.

'CAVOLO NERO'
A handsome Italian kale, with long, plume-like leaves that look very attractive in winter, particularly dusted with frost.

'CURLY SCARLET'
A winter-hardy dwarf variety that turns a purple to red colour after frost. Young leaves can be eaten in salads.

'DWARF GREEN CURLED'
Highly ornamental dwarf variety with curly dark green leaves, as its name suggests. Known for attracting bees.

'RAGGED JACK'
Or 'Russian Red', is an heirloom variety with red-tinged leaves and purple-red stems. Will easily self-seed.

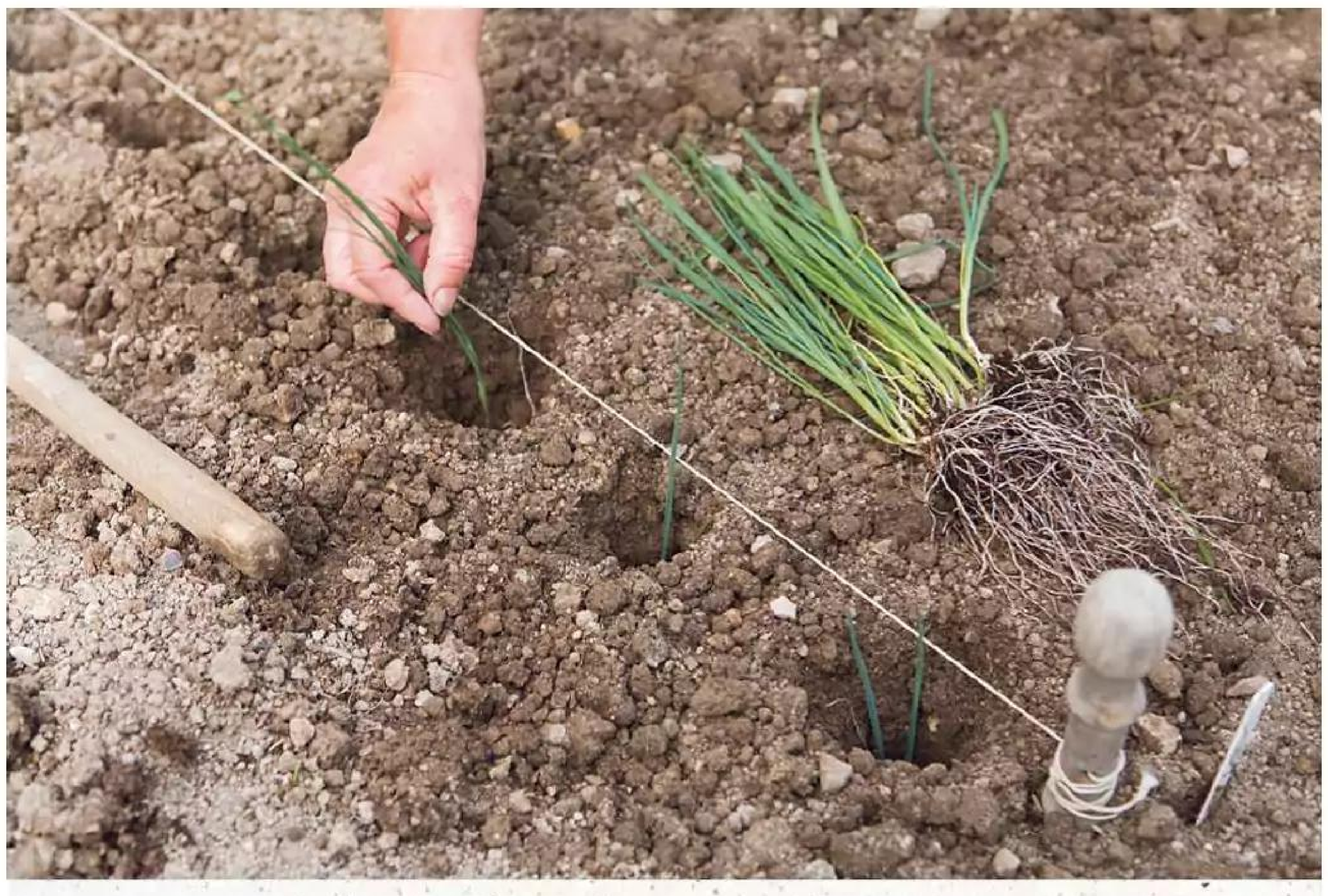
Leeks

Home-grown leeks are far superior to those bought in the shops and are a versatile ingredient in the kitchen. They're easy to grow from seed, and if you sow at intervals from February to April, you can harvest them from late August, through winter until the following February.

	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
SOW		●	●	●								
PLANT OUT					●	●	●					
HARVEST	●	●						●	●	●	●	●

SPACING 1cm deep, 15cm apart, 30cm between rows

AVG. YIELD early: 4-6kg, late: 3-5kg per 3m row



Sowing and planting

- Fill pots or seed trays with good-quality multi-purpose compost and firm gently. Scatter the seed thinly on the surface, cover with a few millimetres of compost, water in and keep moist. Pot on the seedlings individually into small pots. Altenatively, remove from the pot and pull the rootball apart, before placing it in a larger pot of compost and adding compost between the seedlings.
- To prepare the veg plot, fork the soil to remove all debris and large stones and break up any large clods. If necessary, incorporate some well-rotted manure or garden compost to improve soil texture and fertility. Transplant the leeks into the ground when they're about 15-20cm tall. Use a broom handle to make holes 15-20cm deep and about 15cm apart. Leave about 30cm between the rows. Carefully lower one leek plant into each hole, twisting each one between your fingers to get the roots in. Check the roots are in the bottom of the hole and water well so the soil is washed in. Cover the crop with well-pegged-down horticultural fleece.

'Oarsman'

Crop care

Weed in between the plants and water well during hot weather.

Harvesting

Use a fork to lift leeks when harvesting on a heavy soil. You may be able to pull direct on a light soil. For the best freshness and flavour, lift the leeks when you need them.

Storage

You can leave leeks in the ground over winter until you need them.

Troubleshooting

Cover the developing crop with well-pegged-down fleece the moment you plant it. This avoids infestations of leek moth, whose caterpillars cause foliage dieback and low cropping.

Preparation and uses

Steam, boil, bake, slowly sauté in butter or turn into soup. Leeks are a good partner for cheese.

TOP TIP

For longer white stems, earth up around leeks as they reach maturity.

5 TO TRY...

'AUTUMN GIANT 2 - PORVITE'
Produces bulky stems over a long season and has good rust tolerance.

'CARLTON'
Ready to harvest from August, but can be left in the ground until early autumn.

'OARSMAN'
A mid-season variety with good resistance to bolting.

'PANCHO'
An early variety that has an AGM for its performance and reliability.

'TOLEDO'
A late-season variety that has good resistance to bolting.

Lettuces

Growing your own lettuces, whether in pots or in the ground, means you can produce a fantastic variety of flavours, colours and textures. Lettuces are also cheap to grow from seed, can be picked fresh for each meal so there's no waste and they're even pretty enough to grow among your flowers.

	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
SOW			●	●	●	●	●	●	●			
HARVEST			●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	

SPACING 1cm deep, 10-20cm apart, 30cm between rows

AVG. YIELD 8-12 heads per 3m row

Sowing and planting

- Prepare the soil by digging in lots of well-rotted garden compost before sowing. This improves moisture retention, and helps prevent lettuces from bolting in hot or dry weather – especially in light soils.
- Sow seeds thinly along a 1cm-deep drill (trench), made by pressing a bamboo cane into the soil. Cover the seeds thinly with soil (they germinate better with some light) and water them in. Leave 30cm between rows.
- When the seedlings are big enough to handle, thin out to 10-20cm apart. Use the thinnings in a salad. Water to re-settle the soil around the roots of the remaining plants.
- For a steady supply of lettuces, sow a small batch of seeds every 14 days from March through to September.

Crop care

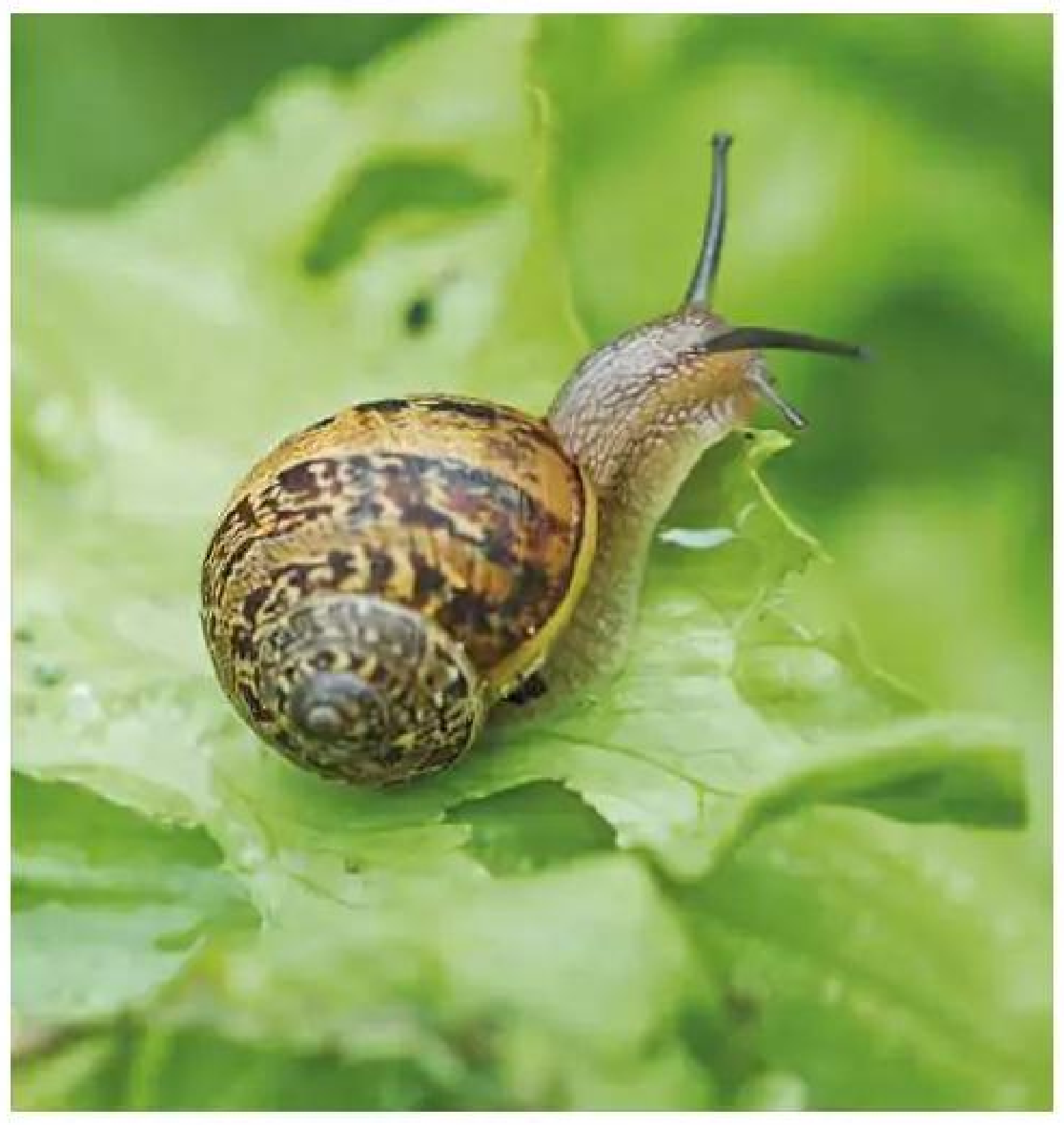
Don't let the soil get too dry, especially if the weather is hot, as the crop will bolt. Mulch the area around your lettuces to hold moisture in the soil and feed your plants regularly. Early- and late-season sowings are less inclined to bolt.

Harvesting

Start picking baby loose-leaf lettuces at around six weeks, and at 10 weeks for hearting types. In hot weather you'll notice a difference in the succulence of your lettuces according to the time of day they are picked. They're best in the early morning, before the leaves dehydrate in the sun.

Storage

Eat lettuces as soon as possible after harvesting, as the leaves wilt especially during warm weather. If you can't eat all your harvest at once, you can store lettuces for a few days in the salad drawer in the bottom of the fridge.



'Little Gem'

'Merveille de Quatre Saisons'

Troubleshooting

Slugs and snails can cause serious crop damage to lettuces, so use copper-impregnated matting or mulch the soil with some sharp grit or crushed seashells. Red or purple leaves seem to be less prone to attack.

Downy mildew fungus can ruin a crop – this is a particular problem in wet weather towards the end of the summer. Avoid splashing the leaves when watering and space the plants far enough apart to ensure there is a good circulation of air.

Grow dill or chervil close to lettuces to ward off aphids.

Preparation and uses

Separate the leaves, then just give them a good wash in cold water and a shake dry. Use them, of course, in salads or as sandwich fillers with cooked meats or cheese. They're also great stir-fried. If you have a glut, try using them to make a refreshing chilled lettuce soup.

5 TO TRY...

There are two main types of lettuce: those that form a head/heart or loose-leaf types.

'LITTLE GEM'
Classic mini cos type. Sweet and crunchy with a compact heart and dark green leaves.

'MERVEILLE DE QUATRE SAISONS'
An old and beautiful variety with green and bronze leaves and an excellent flavour.

'MORTARELLA'
A mid-early romaine type with attractive rich green leaves and a crunchy texture.

'SALAD BOWL'
(red and green). Non-hearting, crops all summer long; pick leaves as needed. Slow to bolt.

'WINTER GEM'
Mini cos type, suitable for winter growing if protected from frost. Mildew resistant.

Onions & shallots

Onions and smaller, milder-tasting shallots are one of the easiest crops you can grow. You can raise them from seed, but it's so much simpler and quicker to start with sets (small onions) and grow them on to cooking size.

ONIONS	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
PLANT			●	●						●	●	
HARVEST						●	●	●	●			

SPACING Leave the tips showing, 10-15cm apart, 30cm between rows

AVG. YIELD 30 large onions per 3m row

SHALLOTS	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
PLANT	●	●	●	●							●	●
HARVEST							●	●				

SPACING Leave the tips showing, 15-20cm apart, 30cm between rows

AVG. YIELD 60-180 large onions per 3m row

Sowing and planting

- You can plant onion and shallot sets in early spring or autumn, direct in the ground soil or into modules. From an autumn planting you'll get earlier, heavier crops. Shallots can also be planted in winter. Both like sun and a moisture-retentive, fertile soil.
- It's worth looking for heat-treated sets, as the resulting plants are less prone to bolting (producing flowers). Bolting reduces the quality of the crop.
- Rake over the soil to break down any large lumps. Plant the sets with the tips showing. Onions need room to swell, so space them 10-15cm apart; space shallots, which produce multiple bulbs, 15-20cm apart. Allow 30cm between rows.
- Cover with fleece or netting so birds can't pull them up.

Crop care

In spring, apply a nitrogen-rich fertiliser to autumn-planted bulbs to give them a boost. Water well in dry spells. Onions and shallots are shallow rooting, so hand weed instead of hoeing between the rows.

Harvesting

Autumn-planted sets are ready after about 36 weeks, spring-planted sets after 20 weeks, but as soon as they are big enough you can pick them. The leaves will droop and turn brown when they've stopped growing.

'Red Sun'

Onions are a great kitchen staple

TOP TIP

Keep plants safe from damaging onion fly by growing pungent parsley among your onions.

Storage

Spread onions and shallots on newspaper or racks to dry. They're ready when the outer skins rustle when you touch them. Hang them in nets in a cool, dark, dry place. They should store well for months.

Troubleshooting

Drooping yellow foliage is the first sign of onion fly larvae, but by then they'll be eating their way through the bulb. You can protect crops by growing them under fleece.

Onion-neck rot is a problem in wet summers – telltale signs are brown marks and fluffy grey mould. Don't overcrowd when planting, and dry bulbs thoroughly before storing.

Shallots usually tend to be trouble-free.

Preparation and uses

Peel and chop onions for soups, stews, pickles and sauces. Use sweeter varieties raw in salads. Shallots are delicious braised whole in casseroles.

5 TO TRY...

ONIONS

'RED BARON'

Sweet enough for salads and superb grilled or roasted. This reliable cropper stores well.

'SETTON'

Produces high yields, is easy to peel and has a strong but sweet flavour.

'SNOWBALL'

White skin and flesh, its mild flavour is perfect for salads. The bulbs store well.

SHALLOTS

'GOLDEN GOURMET'

A heavy cropper with a good flavour. It keeps well and has better resistance to bolting.

'RED SUN'

Good yields of large, red-tinged bulbs with crisp, spicy, white flesh. The bulbs store well. Plant in spring.

Parsnips

Parsnips are a great vegetable for the winter months. The flavoursome roots are good roasted or added to soups and stews, and no Christmas dinner would be complete without a side order of parsnips! They are relatively easy to grow and take time to mature alongside summer-growing vegetables.

	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
SOW			●	●	●							
HARVEST	●	●							●	●	●	●

SPACING 1.5cm deep, 15cm apart, 30cm between rows

AVG. YIELD 4kg per 3m row

Sowing and planting

- Parsnips need an open, sunny site and free-draining, well-worked soil, with no stones. But they don't like overly fertile soil, so don't dig in extra compost or manure.
- Sow seeds directly into the soil from mid-spring when the soil is warmer. Use fresh seeds as they don't tend to keep from year to year.
- Be patient as parsnip seeds take their time to germinate.

Harvest parsnips from September

Crop care

Parsnips have a very long growing season, which is needed so the plants can develop large roots. However, once the plants have established, they will more or less look after themselves. They don't need lots of watering, except in really dry conditions. A good watering every 2-3 weeks should be fine. And they don't need feeding through the season either.

Harvesting

The roots will reach full size by autumn, so you can start pulling up fresh parsnips as required from September onwards. Loosen the soil around the roots before lifting. Parsnips taste sweeter the longer they are left in the ground.

Storage

Parsnips can be stored after harvesting in a cool, dry place. They can be kept for up to four months in sand or compost. Or they can be peeled, chopped and part-cooked before freezing, ready to add to soups or stews.

Troubleshooting

The biggest enemy of parsnips is carrot fly. The larvae of these small, black flies feed on the developing parsnip roots. Prevention is the best method of dealing with this pest. Put up 60cm-high fine mesh barriers around your bed of parsnips, or cover your crop with horticultural fleece. Also, avoid crushing the foliage when you are thinning out the seedlings, as the scent will attract flies.

Parsnip canker is an orangey-brown rot that appears at the top of the root. It is caused by drought or over-rich soil, so regular watering in hot, dry conditions will help. You could also grow canker-resistant varieties and improve soil drainage.

Preparation and uses

Enjoy parsnips drizzled with honey and roasted, mashed or added to soups and stews.

TOP TIP

Try sowing parsnip seeds with annual flowers, which can help to deter carrot fly.

5 TO TRY...

'ALBION' RHS AGM
A canker-resistant variety producing long, smooth roots with a sweet flavour and good texture. The roots store well.

'GLADIATOR' RHS AGM
This has a good flavour and is especially suited to heavy soils. It is known for its smooth roots and good resistance to canker.

'PALACE' RHS AGM
A high-yielding variety that has good canker resistance. Its smooth-skinned roots have a good sweet flavour.

'TENDER AND TRUE' RHS AGM
Long, smooth-skinned roots with an excellent flavour. Matures at different times.

'WHITE GEM'
A reliable, sweet-flavoured variety with good canker resistance. Can be grown on most types of soil.

Peas

Forget about frozen peas, nothing compares with the super-sweet flavour of freshly harvested, tender, home-grown peas. Apart from the taste, they're an attractive crop to grow and won't take up too much space.

	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
SOW	●	●	●	●	●	●	●			●	●	
HARVEST						●	●	●	●	●		

SPACING 3cm deep, 10cm apart, 30cm between rows, distance between rows equal to height

AVG. YIELD 3kg per 3m row

'Hurst Greenshaft'

Sowing and planting

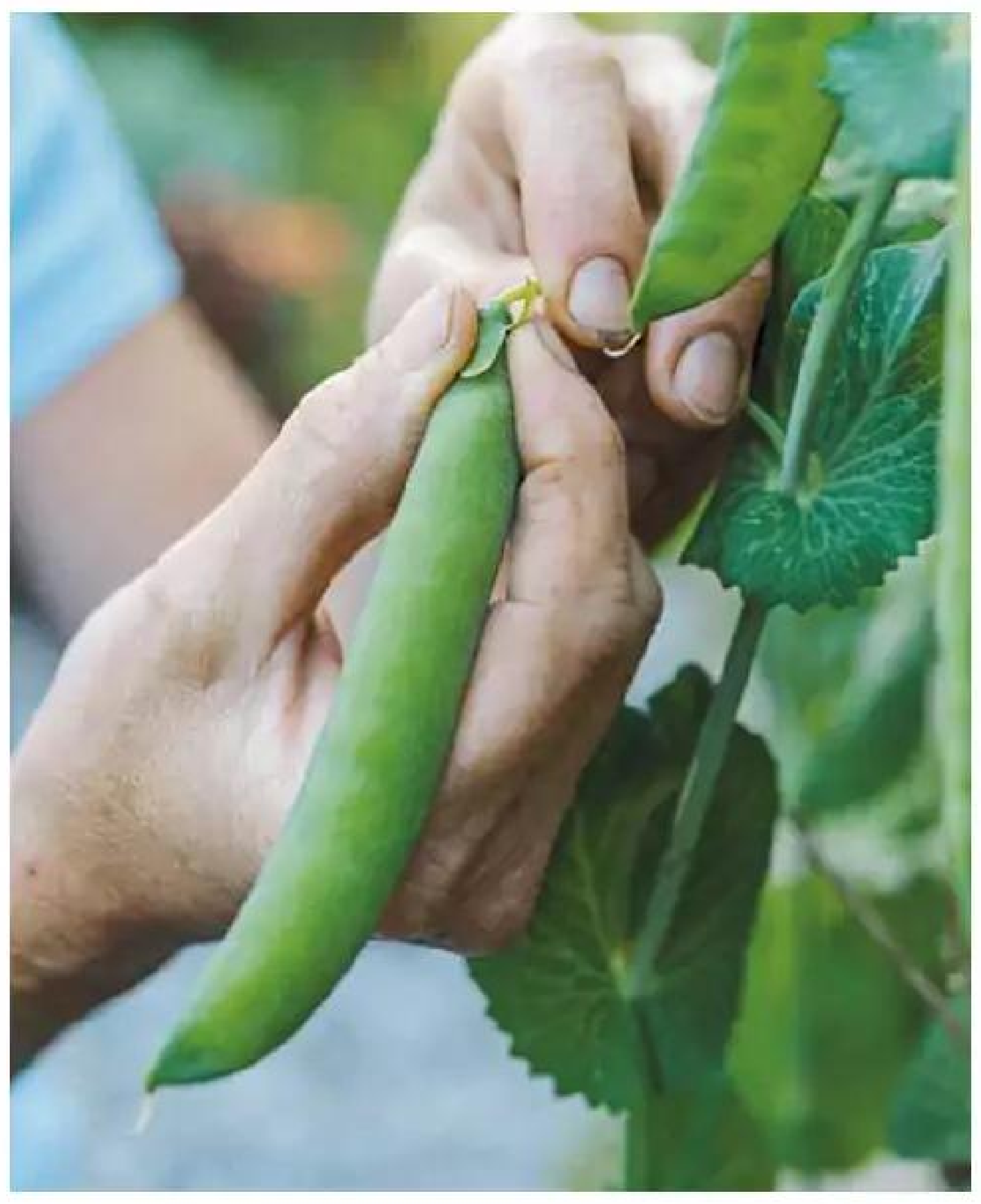
- Peas are generally sown between March and early July. For earlier crops that are ready from May onwards, they can be sown in autumn or late winter, but you may experience losses from cold weather or hungry mice.
- Choose a sunny, free-draining spot, as pea plants dislike cold, wet soil.
- Dig in plenty of garden compost or well-rotted manure before sowing.
- For spring sowings, take a shallow trench, roughly 23cm wide and 3cm deep. Sow in two parallel lines, spacing the seeds about 10cm apart. Cover the seeds with soil, water well and label the row.
- Alternatively, start plants indoors in autumn to avoid seeds being eaten. This is the best method if your garden soil is heavy and very wet in winter.
- An alternative to sowing directly outdoors is to raise plants under cover. You can then plant them out as soon as space becomes available, and there's less risk of pests eating them and leaving gaps in your rows. One of the easiest methods is to sow the seeds in a length of guttering, then simply slide the whole row into the ground once the plants are big enough.

Crop care

To stop plants flopping onto the ground, put supports in place while the plants are still young. Peas climb using shoots called tendrils, which wrap around just about anything they come into contact with, so choose supports that are thin enough for the tendrils to wind around. Large twigs, known as pea sticks, are a traditional choice, but a row of netting is a good alternative.

Harvesting

Peas should be ready to harvest about three months after sowing. Pick mangetout when they're just beginning to show signs of peas forming inside the pods. Other types are ready once the pods are swollen with peas. Pick the pods from the bottom of the plant upwards, as the lowest are the most mature. Use two hands to avoid damaging the plant. Peas have a habit of hiding under the foliage, so hunt around to make sure you find them all.



Storage

Peas have the best flavour if they're picked and used straight away, but they will keep for a week in the salad compartment of a fridge. If you have a glut, peas can be frozen.

Troubleshooting

Pea moth can lead to an infestation of maggots inside the pods, but the risk is reduced if you sow early (October to mid-February) or late (June and July). You can also cover the crop with horticultural fleece or fine mesh as soon as you transplant the seedlings or see them emerge. If slugs are a problem, try copper rings, gritty barriers or a biological control. Or try growing peas in huge pots, but keep them well watered.

Preparation and uses

Steam or boil and serve with mint and a knob of butter. You can also add peas to risottos or pasta dishes, during the last few minutes of cooking.

5 TO TRY...

'CANOE'
Slightly curved and pointed pods of up to 12 peas on almost leafless stems, making for easy picking.

'GREENSAGE'
Early maincrop variety that's a heavy cropper, its peas are tender and sweet.

'HURST GREENSHAFT'
A tall variety producing heavy crops, the pods reach 10cm long and are tightly packed with about 10 peas in each.

'KELVEDON WONDER' AGM
A prolific cropper, this early dwarf variety produces sweet, tender peas.

'PURPLE PODDED'
Showy purple pods and sweet peas from July to September. Heritage variety.

Peppers & chillies

If you can grow tomatoes successfully, you'll be able to grow peppers and chillies too. Given a warm, sunny spot on a south-facing patio or windowsill, these eye-catching plants will reward you with rich pickings. .

	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
SOW		●	●	●								
PLANT OUT					●	●						
HARVEST							●	●	●	●		

SPACING 0.5cm deep, 45cm apart, 60-75cm between rows

AVG. YIELD 2-3kg per 3m row

Sowing and planting

- Although they can be grown in the ground, sweet peppers and chillies tend to fare best in containers. They need plenty of moisture and hate bad drainage, so use a soil-based compost with lots of added grit.
- They will crop well outside in a sunny, sheltered location, but for even better results grow them in a greenhouse or conservatory or on a sunny windowsill.
- Sow seeds indoors in spring, then transplant the seedlings into individual 7.5cm pots when the first true leaves appear and they're well rooted. Move them eventually into 30cm pots, or plant three to a growing bag. Wait until May, after the last frost, before putting them outside.

Crop care

Water little and often. As soon as the first flowers appear, feed regularly with a high-potash liquid fertiliser such as tomato feed. Pinch out the growing tips when plants are about 20cm tall to encourage bushy growth. Stake each plant and tie in regularly with twine to prevent the stems snapping under the weight of fruit. In hot spells, mist the plants to deter red spider mite.

Harvesting

Both peppers and chillies will be ready to pick from late summer. Harvest peppers when they're green or leave them until they turn red and develop a sweeter flavour. Some yellow varieties start out green, while others are yellow from the word go.

For the mildest flavour, pick chillies while they're still green, leave them to turn yellow for extra bite, or bright red for more heat. Don't touch your face or eyes while picking or preparing them.

'Naga Morich'

Storage

Sweet peppers are best eaten fresh, but will keep for a few days in the fridge. You can store dried chillies in an airtight jar in a cool, dark place.

Troubleshooting

Watch out for blossom end rot and grey mould. These are caused by erratic watering, so be sure to water regularly. Red spider mite can be deterred by regular misting, while a soapy spray should despatch any whitefly.

Preparation and uses

To prepare a sweet pepper, remove the seeds and stalk. Slice it raw in salads, or add it to ratatouille and stir-fries. Chillies add heat to curries, stir-fries and, of course, chilli con carne. Removing the seeds tones down their fieriness.

TOP TIP

If you burn your mouth while eating chillies, try a spoonful of sugar or a glass of milk rather than water.

5 TO TRY...

SWEET PEPPERS

'GYPSY'

Lots of sweet, well-flavoured fruits that turn orange to red. Will fruit outdoors.

'MOHAWK'

A strong grower that bears plenty of small, sweet green fruits that ripen to orange.

CHILLIES

'NAGA MORICH'

A searingly hot variety that will test your tastebuds, the fruits are 5-7cm long.

'RAZZAMATAZZ'

Medium-hot, upward-facing chillies that are perfect for growing in containers.

'TRINIDAD MORUGA SCORPION'

Has a fruity flavour and packs a sizzling punch – buy young plants, as this one can be tricky to grow from seed.

There are many different varieties of chilli you can grow

'Trinidad Moruga Scorpion Yellow' is extremely hot!

Potatoes

From earthy new potatoes and bite-sized salad varieties to floury bakers and roasters, the humble potato remains the nation's favourite vegetable. If you're a potato aficionado, there's a huge number of exciting varieties you can try growing that you'll never find in the shops.

	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
CHIT	●	●	●	●								
PLANT			●	●	●							
HARVEST					●	●	●	●	●	●		

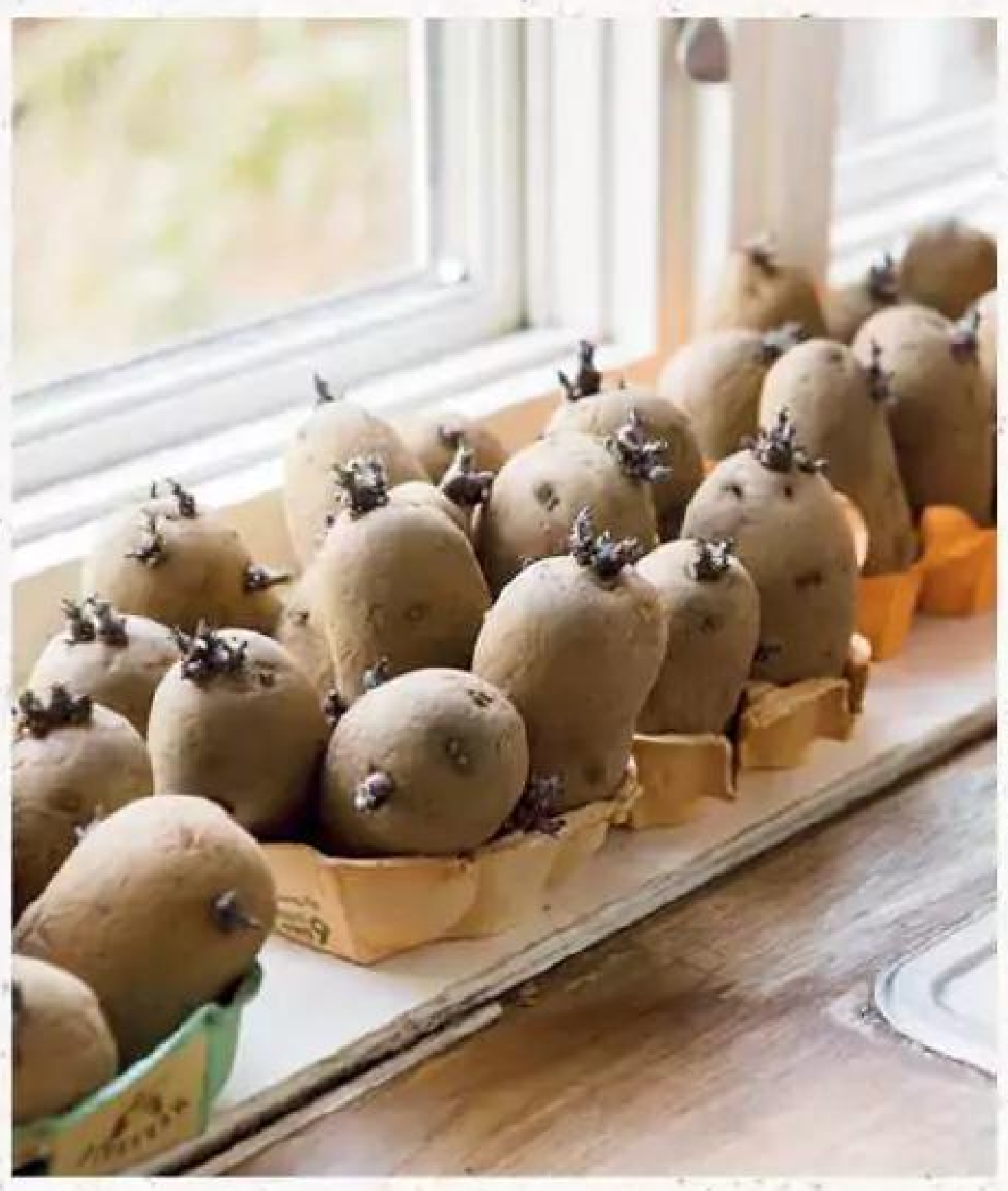
SPACING 12cm deep, 30-38cm apart, 75cm between rows

AVG. YIELD 10kg per 3m row

Potatoes are categorised by the season in which they're ready to harvest.

- **Early** – or new potatoes – are planted in March and harvested in late May to early July.
- **Maincrop** potatoes take longer to mature. Plant them in April and harvest in late summer/early autumn for crops to store into winter.

'Charlotte'



Planting

- Grow your crop from seed potatoes, which are small tubers rather than seeds. They go on sale in late winter. Don't be tempted to save old potatoes from the veg rack, as they won't produce reliable crops.
- Before planting potatoes, you need to chit them to encourage shoots to form. Place in trays or egg cartons with the end that has the most 'eyes' uppermost. Place in a cool, light spot until the shoots are 1-2cm long. This can take up to six weeks.
- Potatoes do well in all types of soil, but the richer the better, so dig in plenty of well-rotted organic matter such as garden compost. They also like an open, sunny site. While maincrop potatoes grow well in the ground, early or salad varieties will also do well in containers. Potato growing bags are handy if you're short of space.
- When growing potatoes in the ground, early and salad types should be planted in March, 12cm deep and 30cm apart, with 75cm between rows.
- Plant maincrop varieties in April. These must stay in the ground longer and need more space to produce a decent crop. Plant 12cm deep and 40cm apart, with 75cm between rows. Plant potatoes with the shoots (or 'eyes') facing upwards.

Growing in pots

Choose a large container and add compost to a depth of 15cm. Plant one or two 'chitted' potatoes and just cover them with compost. Stand the pot in a greenhouse or outside somewhere warm, bright and frost-free. When the shoots are 20cm long, bury them in moist compost. Keep 'earthing up' as the shoots grow until you've filled the pot. Water regularly and add a liquid feed to one watering each week.

Crop care

As the plants grow, cover the shoots with soil to stop developing tubers turning green and inedible. This is called 'earthing up'. When plants reach 20cm high, use a rake to draw soil around the foliage, leaving the top few centimetres poking out.

As the plants grow, you'll need to earth them up again. Or once you've planted your potatoes, cover the area with black plastic. When you can see bumps under the sheeting, make a cross cut in the plastic for the foliage to pop through. The plastic will shield the tubers from light. Water regularly, especially in dry spells and keep weed-free.

Harvesting

Depending on the variety, you'll have crops from May to October. Lift early and salad potatoes when the plants are still flowering and the potatoes are the size of a large hen's egg. Cut the tops off, then gently prise the plants out of the ground with a fork. Dig up potatoes as and when you need them. Leave maincrop ones in the ground until the leaves turn yellow and die down. Choose a dry day to harvest your crop: cut off the tops and dig up your potatoes, discarding any damaged ones. To harvest potatoes in pots, simply tip out the contents.

Storage

Maincrop potatoes store well for months in a cool, frost-free place. Store only perfect ones, removing any showing signs of damage, and don't wash before storing. All light must be excluded to prevent them from turning green. Check them regularly and remove rotten ones.

Troubleshooting

Slugs can be a problem, especially with potatoes growing under black plastic. Blight is a fungal disease that turns the foliage yellow, causes dark patches and makes the tubers rot, so grow a blight-resistant variety. Never grow potatoes in the same soil year after year as you'll encourage pests. These include potato eelworm, which causes stunted growth and poor cropping.

Preparation and uses

Wash and scrub potatoes before frying, boiling, baking, mashing, roasting or sautéeing. Never eat potatoes raw. Green potatoes can cause severe stomach upsets.

5 TO TRY...

EARLY VARIETIES

'ANNABELLE'
Compact, small tubers with white skin and golden flesh. Disease resistant.

'CHARLOTTE'
Yellow skin and flesh, with a lovely flavour, this variety remains firm when cooked.

'CHERIE'
A delicious red-skinned salad variety that has pale yellow waxy flesh.

MAINCROP VARIETIES

'BLUE DANUBE'
With purple skin and white flesh, this variety is also resistant to blight.

'ISLE OF JURA'
An excellent all-rounder, with large crops from late summer. Disease resistant.

Pumpkins & squash

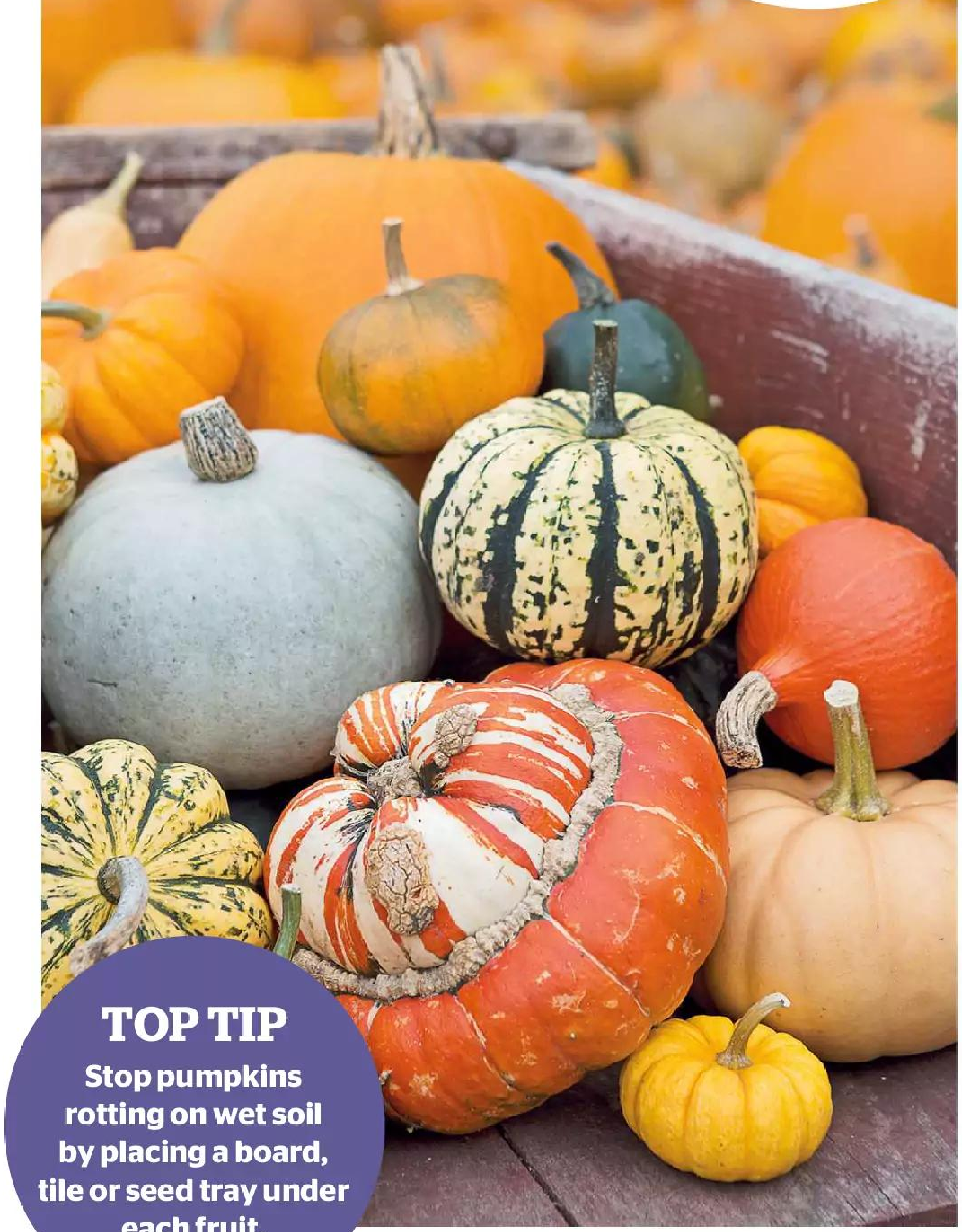
Scan the pages of a seed catalogue and you'll find a far better range of pumpkins and squash than you ever would in a shop. Ornamental and good to eat, they require little attention to produce great autumn crops that store well into winter.

	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
SOW			●	●	●	●						
PLANT OUT					●	●						
HARVEST						●	●	●	●	●		

SPACING 2.5cm deep, 90cm apart, 90cm between rows

AVG. YIELD 1 large or 4-6 small fruits per plant

'Howden's Big Boy'



Sowing and planting

- Sow seeds indoors in spring. Soak them in water overnight to speed up germination, then sow two seeds into 8cm pots filled with seed compost. Place the seeds on their edge, rather than flat, to stop water sitting on top and causing them to rot. Put them on a warm, light windowsill and water well.
- When the seedlings appear, remove the weaker one so the strongest has plenty of room to develop.
- Once the risk of frost has passed, in late May or early June, plant outside. Choose a sheltered, sunny spot and dig lots of garden compost into the soil. Insert a cane next to each plant and you'll be able to find its centre for watering, no matter how large it grows. Plant around 90cm apart, according to the variety. Cover surrounding soil with a mulch of compost to retain moisture.

Crop care

Plants will rapidly put on growth. Depending on the space available, either let them trail over the ground or train them up a support. Make sure the support is sturdy enough to take the heavy weight. Stems touching the ground can be pegged down to encourage them to root into the soil.

Pumpkins have separate male and female flowers. You can tell them apart as the female has a swelling behind it. To help the plant form fruit, insert the male flower into the female one to transfer pollen.

Feed every two weeks once the first fruits start to grow. Use a liquid fertiliser such as a tomato feed that's high in potassium.

Keep the ground weed-free while the plants are getting established, but once they get going the large leaves will deter weeds from growing. Water the plants regularly, especially in dry weather. As the pumpkins and squash develop, cut away any foliage that is shading the fruits to help them ripen.

Harvesting

Pumpkins and squash are ready to harvest when the stem begins to crack and the skin hardens. Pick them all before the first frosts, in October or November, cutting to retain as long a stem as possible.

Storage

The fruits keep best if you place them in the sun for about 10 days before storing. This toughens the skin and acts as a barrier to stop them drying out in storage. Cover them on frosty nights, then store somewhere cool, dry and ventilated, and they should keep for six months.

Troubleshooting

Powdery mildew can be a problem on leaves, especially if the soil is dry. Water well and mulch to retain moisture at the roots and encourage good air circulation around the leaves. If the infection hits early in the year, pick off infected parts promptly.

Preparation and uses

Pumpkins and squash can be boiled, steamed or roasted. Ornamental varieties make an attractive autumnal display.

TOP TIP

Stop pumpkins rotting on wet soil by placing a board, tile or seed tray under each fruit.

5 TO TRY...

'BABY BEAR'
A compact, succulent orange pumpkin, perfect for growing in smaller gardens.

'HOWDEN'S BIG BOY'
Traditional orange variety – ideal for Halloween.

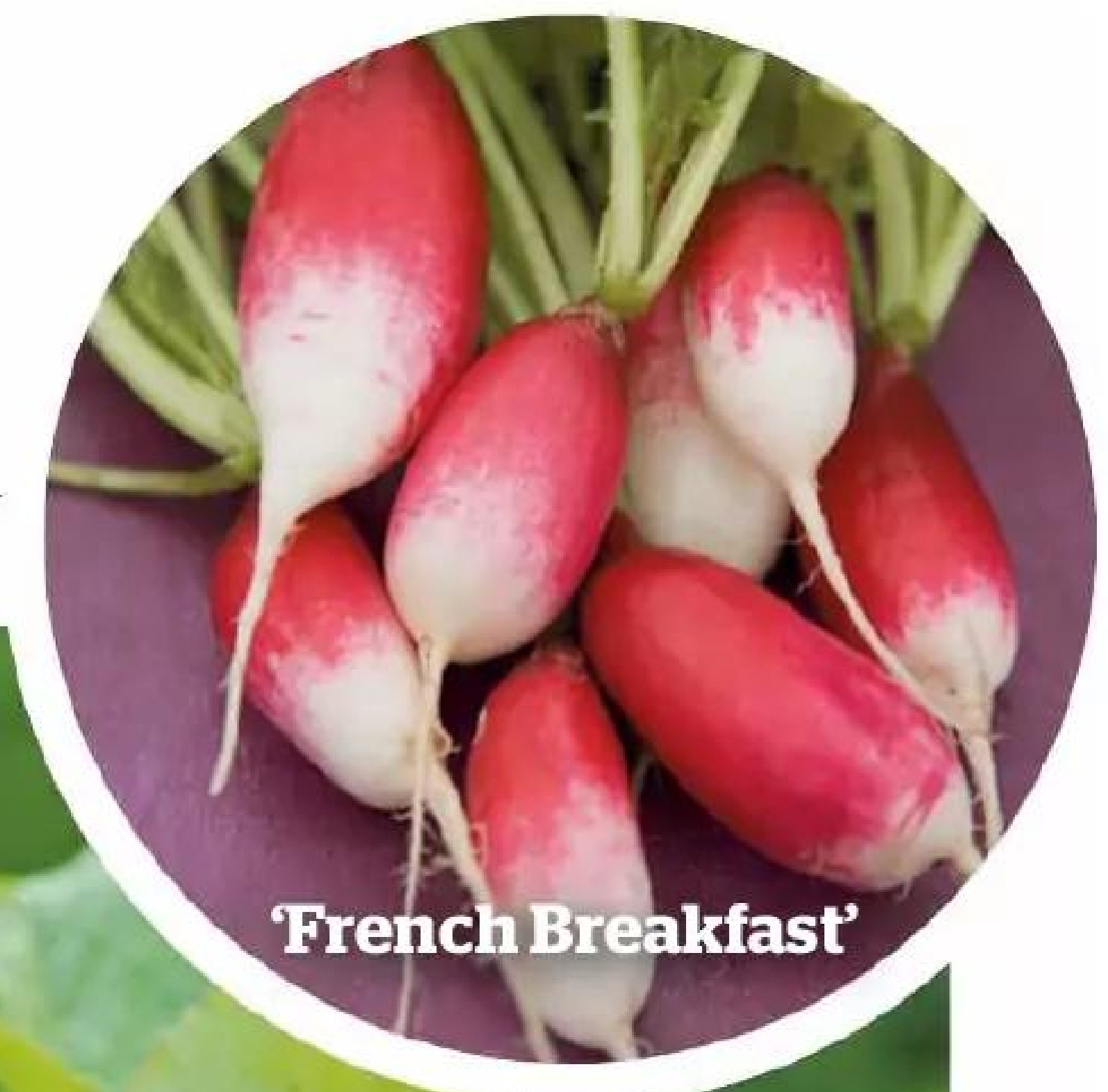
'CROWN PRINCE'
A prolific cropper with blue-grey-skinned fruits.

'SUNSHINE'
This winter variety has a sweet, nutty flavour.

'TURK'S TURBAN'
A decorative squash with orange and green flesh. Tastes similar to butternut squash.

Radishes

Radishes are easy to grow and make a tasty addition to salads, or a crisp and crunchy snack on their own. There are many different types to choose from, ranging from near spherical red and white roots, to long, thin white radishes, also known as mooli. They are great for children to grow from seed, as they are quick to germinate and produce reliable results.



'French Breakfast'

'Scarlet Globe'

	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
SOW		●	●	●	●	●	●	●				
HARVEST	●	●			●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●

SPACING 1cm deep, 2.5cm apart (winter 23cm apart), 15cm between rows

AVG. YIELD Summer, 100-120; winter, 10 per 3m row

Sowing and planting

Sow radishes every few weeks through the summer for a regular supply. Seeds can be sown directly into warm soil, either in beds or in containers and growing bags.

Crop care

Radishes prefer warm soil and need plenty of moisture for healthy growth, so water regularly. Thin out the seedlings if sown closely together to encourage individual plants to form roots.

Harvesting

When thinning radishes, you can add the young leaves to salads as a micro-green. If you are growing them for the crunchy roots, summer radishes should be ready to harvest after about three to six weeks – they will quickly get woody if left too long in the ground. Winter cultivars can be harvested from November onwards.

TOP TIP

Grow radishes in between rows of slower-growing crops – they will help to suppress unwanted weeds.

Storage

Eat summer radishes as young roots fresh from picking. Winter radishes, such as mooli, can be left in the ground to harvest as needed, or stored in a cool, dry place.

Troubleshooting

Young radish leaves are a magnet for slugs and snails, so put protection in place after sowing the seeds. The leaves can also be affected by flea beetle – look out for holes in the leaves. The best method of prevention is to grow them under horticultural fleece. Also, give them fertiliser, as strong plants will be able to fend off pests.

Preparation and uses

Fresh radishes give a peppery lift to salads in summer and can be eaten raw to add crunch and flavour. You can also pickle them in rice vinegar and caster sugar.

5 TO TRY...

'APRIL CROSS'
Long white roots up to 30cm long, this winter variety is good in salads and stir-fries.

'DIANA'
Spherical purple and white variety. Also ideal for growing in containers.

'FRENCH BREAKFAST' RHS AGM
A popular summer radish with cylindrical red and white roots. Fast-maturing.

'PING PONG' RHS AGM
Round white roots that are slightly milder in flavour.

'SCARLET GLOBE'
Spherical red roots with crisp flesh and a mild flavour.

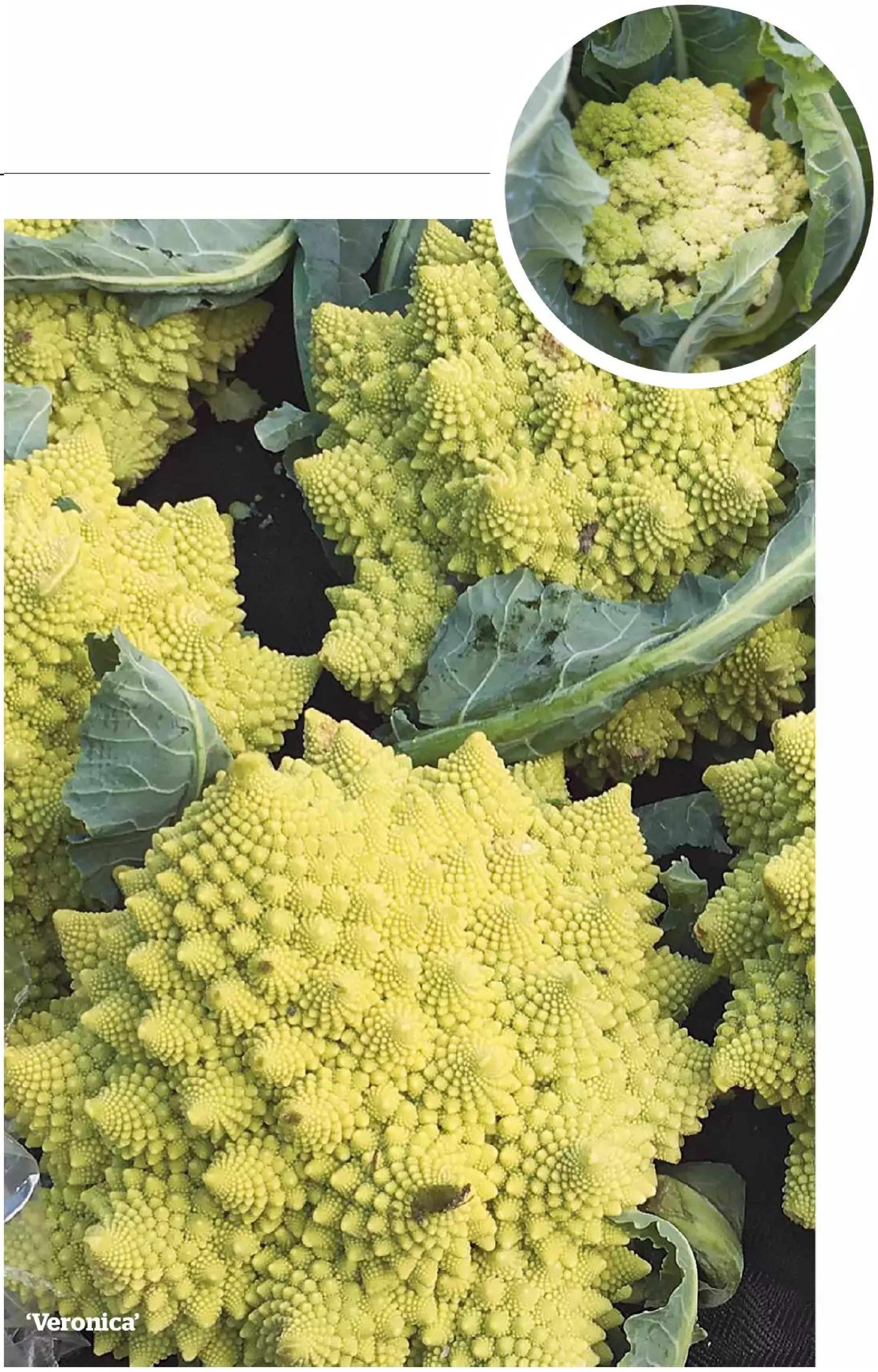
Romanesco

Cauliflower 'Romanesco' is the glamorous cousin of the humble cabbage family. It is Italian in origin, with distinctive lime-green heads made up of numerous geometric florets. It is a beautiful and unusual vegetable, and is becoming increasingly popular.

	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
SOW				●	●	●						
PLANT OUT						●	●					
HARVEST									●	●	●	

SPACING 1cm deep, 45cm apart, 60cm between rows

AVG. YIELD 5-6 per 3m row



'Veronica'

Sowing and planting

- Like other brassicas, Cauliflower 'Romanesco' thrives in a fairly heavy, alkaline soil – if your soil is acidic, just add lime.
- Choose a sheltered, sunny spot in soil that has been prepared in advance by digging in well-rotted farmyard manure. Tread the soil down to firm it.
- Sow seeds in late spring either in a prepared seedbed or in pots or seed trays in free-draining compost. When the seedlings are large enough to handle, thin them out to approximately 7cm apart. Once they have grown to 10cm, transplant them to their growing spot in the vegetable patch, planting 45cm apart in rows 60cm apart.
- Plant young romanesco plants deeply, and very firmly, to give each one stability and protect against swaying on windy days. Water well after planting.

Crop care

Water the plants regularly, particularly in dry weather. Feed with a high-nitrogen fertiliser when the plants are established and growing well. This will boost their growth and help the formation of the intricate green heads.

Harvesting

Romanesco cauliflowers are ready to harvest in the autumn, from September onwards. You can wait until they have grown larger flower heads, or harvest smaller flower heads, as with sprouting broccoli, and get a second crop.

Storage

Romanesco is best eaten freshly harvested. But you can store it for up to two weeks in a fridge or a cool cupboard.

Troubleshooting

Protect the young seedlings and plants from slugs and snails and, when transplanting, make sure you net the plants against pigeon damage. Club root can be a problem, as with all members of the brassica family.

Preparation and uses

The flavour is similar to cauliflower, but milder, nuttier and with a crunchier texture. Romanesco can be eaten hot or cold in salads; it can also be roasted or sautéed in olive oil with onions and garlic.

5 TO TRY...

***'BRASSICA OLERACEA VAR. BOTRYTIS* 'ROMANESCO'**

The classic Italian romanesco, with its typical pointed, patterned lime-green heads.

'CELIO'

A vigorous variety, ready 5-6 months after sowing in early spring. Excellent flavour.

'GITANO'

A late-summer to autumn variety with 'pyramid' heads and good mildew resistance.

'ROMANESCO EARLY'

Matures in early autumn after a May sowing. The crisp, tasty heads measure 15-23cm.

'VERONICA'

Good-sized crops from late summer to early frosts. This is good choice for successional plantings.

Salad leaves

Whether you like your leaves green and crispy, red and frilly, or peppery and spicy, there's a salad crop for you. There's a a huge choice of seed available, and growing your own is far cheaper than buying bags from the supermarket. Growing cut-and-come-again salads is fast, too – from sowing to picking can take just six weeks. And with frequent sowings, you'll have regular harvests over many months.

	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
SOW			●	●	●	●	●	●	●			
PLANT OUT					●	●	●					
HARVEST	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●

SPACING 1cm deep, 15cm apart, 15cm between rows

AVG. YIELD 10 bunches per 3m row (based on rocket)

Sowing and planting

- Salad leaves grow well in poor soils, although reduce the risk of crops going to seed in hot summers by improving moisture retention. Adding plenty of well-rotted organic matter will help.
- Start sowing in March, as soon as the soil is workable, and continue until September (or longer if you cover plants with a cloche or fleece and choose winter varieties).
- Make sowings every two weeks to ensure continuous cropping. Prepare the seedbed by removing any weeds and stones and raking over the soil to create a fine texture. Next, make shallow drills about 1cm deep. Water along the drill and sprinkle seeds along the bottom. Cover thinly with soil or compost and water in gently.
- You can also grow small patches of salad leaves in any gaps in your borders.
- Salad leaves also grow well in pots, boxes and trays. Fill your container with multi-purpose compost, to 2cm below the rim, then firm down. Scatter seeds over the surface, cover lightly with compost and water well.

Crop care

Don't let the soil dry out. When the plants reach about 5cm high, mulch around them with compost to seal moisture in the soil.

Harvesting

When large enough to handle (about 4cm high), carefully tease out the crowded seedlings with your fingers. Either add them to salads or transplant them to another site to grow on. Leave about 15cm between the remaining seedlings. With cut-and-come-again varieties, you should pick only a few leaves from each plant – taking little and often will keep the plants cropping for longer. Once the plants start to flower, the leaves turn bitter, so pull them up, put them on the compost heap and sow some more.

TOP TIP

If space is limited, you can produce tasty salads by sowing seeds directly into a pot.

Storage

Pick and eat fresh, although a bowlful of washed leaves will keep for several days in the fridge.

Troubleshooting

Put down slug and snail deterrents and encourage their predators, such as frogs and beetles. Cover salads with fleece to keep off flea beetles, which eat holes in the leaves.

Preparation and uses

Wash, shake dry and eat straight away. Depending on the mix of leaves and flavours, use them in salads, sandwich fillings, stir-fries and as attractive garnishes.

5 TO TRY...

'BABY SALAD LEAVES MIXED'
A blend of lettuces in different colours, shapes and sizes.

'SALAD BOWL'
Medium-sized green leaves; a slow-to-bolt variety.

'SPEEDY MIX'
Fast-cropping mix of rocket and oriental mustard.

'SPICY MIX'
May include pak choi, mizuna, Greek cress and mustard.

WILD ROCKET
Dark green with a distinctive peppery taste.

Spinach

Spinach is high in nutrients, fast and easy to grow and great eaten as a cut-and-come again baby-leaf crop, or as larger leaves. It can be grown all year round if you choose the right varieties and works well in containers, too.

	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
SOW			●	●	●			●	●	●		
HARVEST	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●

SPACING 2.5cm deep, 7.5cm apart, 30cm between rows

AVG. YIELD 6kg per 3m row

Sowing and planting

- Make sure you choose a site that is sunny but sheltered. Add plenty of bulky organic matter to the soil to create the best growing conditions and produce well-flavoured leaves.
- Make a shallow drill in well-prepared fertile soil in a sunny spot and sow seeds thinly, approximately 2.5cm deep. Cover the seeds with soil and water well. Sow in rows 30cm apart. Cover with cloches or fleece protection if the weather is still cool.
- Sow a batch of spinach every 3-4 weeks for a regular supply throughout the growing season.

Crop care

Spinach thrives in fertile soil that does not easily dry out. If you have a very hot, dry garden, you can set up temporary shade for your spinach crop to stop it bolting. After thinning your sowings to 7.5cm apart, the most important thing is to keep your spinach well watered. For sowings later in the year, protect seedlings with cloches or fleece for a supply through the winter months.

Harvesting

Your crop is ready to harvest 6-10 weeks after sowing. As a general rule, you can pick summer varieties from May to October and winter ones between October and April. But keep an eye on your crop as spinach usually grows quicker in warmer weather. Cut the leaves with a sharp knife to encourage new growth.

Spinach is ready to harvest 6-10 weeks after sowing

'Amazon'

TOP TIP

Spinach grows well between beans or peas on a small plot. But you must move spinach around a plot as downy mildew can remain in the soil and re-infect a crop.

Storage

Spinach is best eaten fresh when the nutrient content is at its highest. It can also be frozen for later use in soups and omelettes.

Troubleshooting

Protect young seedlings from slugs, snails and birds. Spinach is prone to downy mildew, which is worse in humid weather. Mildew-resistant varieties are available, but the best method of prevention is good spacing around the plants to help the air to circulate. Target watering to the base of the plants.

Preparation and uses

Enjoy spinach just wilted in the pan or serve young fresh leaves in salads. Makes good smoothies, too.

5 TO TRY...

'AMAZON' RHS AGM

This fast-growing variety with rounded leaves makes a tasty, quick harvest. Mildew-resistant and ideal for spring and autumn growing.

'APOLLO'

Gives a good yield with leaves that taste good as a baby leaf crop or when mature. Bolt-resistant and good in pots.

'MEDANIA' RHS AGM

Produces lots of dark green leaves with a good flavour, whether eaten as a baby leaf or a mature crop. Can be sown in autumn for next spring.

'PALCO' RHS AGM

This mildew-resistant variety is slow to bolt. High-yielding, producing quality dark green leaves throughout the season.

'PERPETUAL'

A good variety that does not bolt easily and will grow on dry soils. Good for summer, autumn and winter crops.

Spring onions

Also known as scallions, spring onions are quick and easy to grow and are a great ingredient for salads and stir-fries. They do not need a lot of space or much soil, so they're perfect for growing in smaller spaces or containers. As some varieties can be grown through the winter months, they have a long cropping season.

	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
SOW			●	●	●	●	●	●	●			
HARVEST			●	●		●	●	●	●	●	●	

SPACING 1cm deep, 2.5-5cm apart, 10cm between rows

AVG. YIELD 250-300 per 3m row

Sowing and planting

- Sow spring onion seeds straight into the ground where they will grow.
- They need an open, sunny site and rich, free-draining soil.
- Clear any weeds and add a good fertiliser well in advance – if the soil is too acidic the onions will produce a lot of leafy top growth. Rake it to a fine texture and, if very dry, water 24 hours before sowing.
- Sow the seeds into drills approximately 1cm deep with 10cm between rows.

Crop care

Once your spring onion seedlings start to appear, thin them to 2.5cm-5cm apart. They need to be well-watered, so don't let the soil dry out.

Some varieties can also be grown as bulb onions, so it is possible to harvest some of your crop as spring onions, leaving some alternate seedlings to mature into full bulbs.

If you want to harvest spring onions through the year, sow a batch of seeds every few weeks from early spring through to autumn.

Harvesting

Spring onions are usually ready to harvest about eight weeks after sowing. Fork the soil around the plants a little before carefully pulling up the bulbs.

Storage

Spring onions are best eaten soon after picking, either cooked or raw.

Troubleshooting

Given the right growing conditions, spring onions are relatively trouble-free to grow.

Preparation and uses

Use in salads as well as omelettes. They're also a staple of Oriental stir-fried dishes.

Red spring onions

TOP TIP

Try growing mint alongside your spring onion crops as a deterrent against onion fly.

5 TO TRY...

'ELODY' RHS AGM
Mild-flavoured, very hardy variety that can be harvested year-round.

'LILIA' RHS AGM
This red Italian variety has a strong flavour. It can also be grown as a bulb onion.

'NORTH HOLLAND BLOOD RED'
This red onion is mild-flavoured and can be grown as a salad onion or as a bulb.

'PERFORMER'
The white stems and leaves are mild-tasting and can be used like chives.

'WHITE LISBON' RHS AGM
A popular choice, as it is fast-growing and can be sown into the autumn to grow through the winter months.

Sweetcorn

Home-grown sweetcorn cooked within minutes of picking – or even eaten raw – is simply the sweetest and juiciest you'll ever taste. A favourite on the allotment, it has a statuesque, leafy structure and an easy-going nature. It's also great to plant in bold blocks in your borders, or as a productive screen to divide up areas of your garden.

	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
SOW				●	●	●						
PLANT OUT						●						
HARVEST							●	●	●	●		

SPACING 2.5cm deep, 45cm apart, 45cm between rows

AVG. YIELD 6-9 cobs per 3m row

Sowing and planting

- Sweetcorn is a tender plant, so choose a sunny, sheltered spot. Ideally, you should have dug in lots of well-rotted garden compost the previous autumn to feed the soil.
- Sow seeds in pots or modules of good-quality compost. The seedlings hate root disturbance, so it's best to give each seed its own pot. Water well, then place on a sunny windowsill or in a greenhouse to germinate.
- Once all risk of frost is over, harden off young plants by putting them outdoors during the day for a week or so to acclimatise them to cooler conditions. Plant them outside in a sunny, sheltered spot, spacing plants in a grid (see below) at least 45cm apart.
- As sweetcorn is wind-pollinated, the plants must be grown in blocks (four by four for instance) rather than in a single row.

Crop care

Water plants regularly, especially during dry spells, as sweetcorn uses and loses a lot of water due to the large leaf area of each plant. Spread a mulch around the base of the plants to keep the roots cool and moist. In windy weather, plants may loosen in the ground, so build up the soil around the stem bases to stabilise them.

Harvesting

Each plant should produce one or two cobs. They're ready to harvest when the silky tassels turn brown and the kernels, when pressed with a thumbnail, exude a milky liquid. Give the cobs a sharp twist to remove them. Pick them moments before using, because the sugars start converting to starch the minute you harvest them. The Supersweet varieties, however, will stay sweeter for a couple of days.

'Mirai Bicolour'

'Rising Sun'

TOP TIP

If growing a Supersweet variety, position plants as far from other sweetcorn varieties as possible, otherwise they may cross-pollinate, reducing the crop's sweetness.

Storage

It seems a shame to strip the kernels from the cobs so, instead, blanch them whole in boiling water for four minutes, drain, then wrap in plastic bags and freeze immediately.

Troubleshooting

Protect plants from mice, birds and slugs. Sweetcorn has shallow roots that are easily damaged by hoeing.

Preparation and uses

Strip away the husks and silky tassels and snap off the stalks. Steam, microwave or barbecue the cobs until *al dente*, then dot with butter.

5 TO TRY...

'EARLIBIRD'
This earliest-maturing Supersweet variety has a good tolerance of cold soil.

'LARK'
A Tendersweet variety for superior sweetness, with softer, less chewy kernels.

'MIRAI BICOLOUR'
Supersweet variety with golden kernels; considered the most delicious available.

'RISING SUN'
Succulent Supersweet cobs on vigorous plants; reliable even in poor summers.

'SWIFT'
Early-maturing, extra-tender Supersweet variety, with a dwarf habit. It will cope with cold soil.

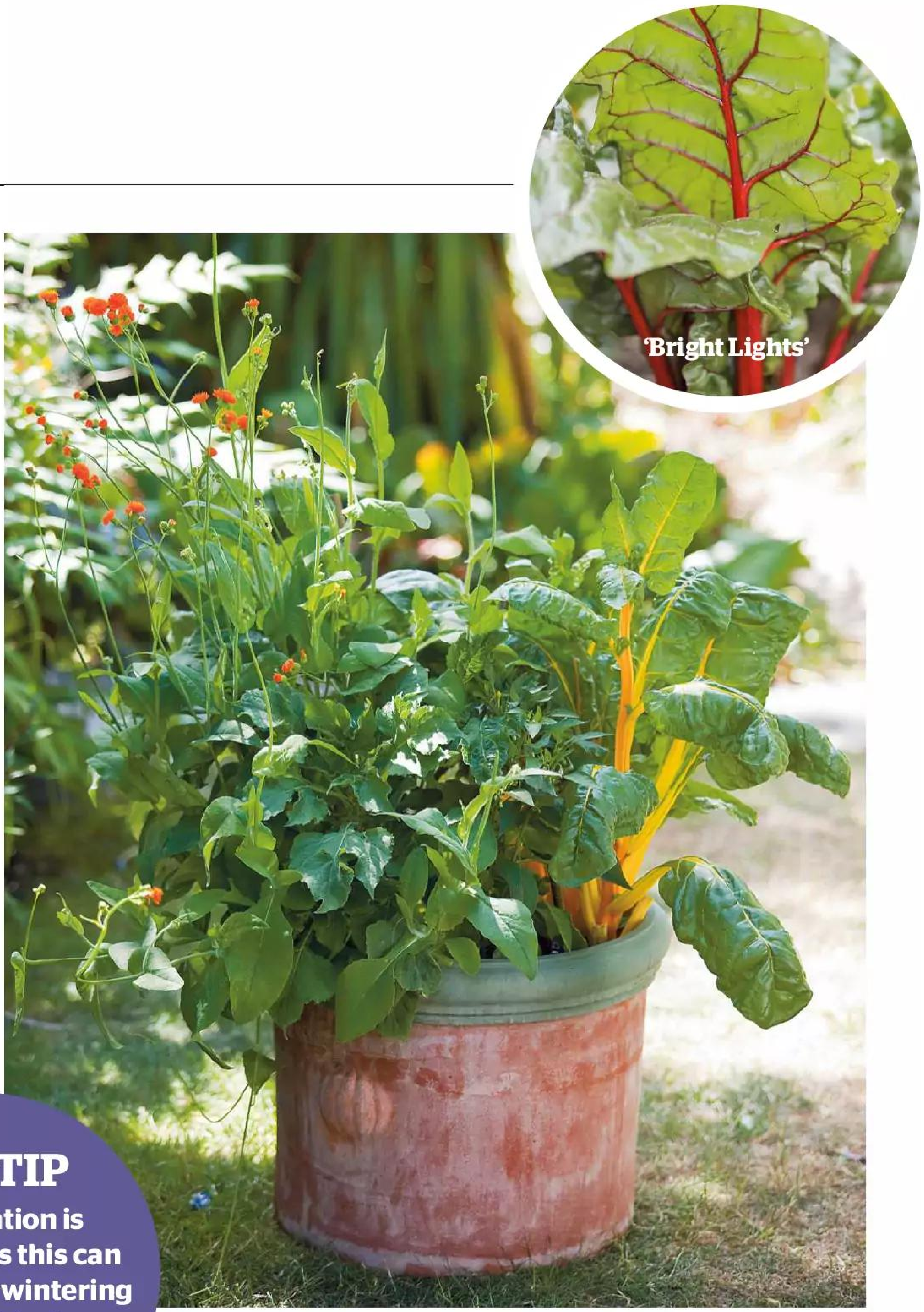
Swiss chard

A delicious alternative to spinach, Swiss chard is easy to grow and relatively low maintenance. With its ornamental leaves and stems, it looks just as good in containers and borders as the vegetable plot. Packed with vitamins, the leaves make a colourful addition to stir-fries and soups, and very young, tender leaves are great in salads. The stalks can be cooked separately and are equally tasty.

	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
SOW			●	●	●	●	●					
PLANT OUT					●	●						
HARVEST								●	●	●	●	●

SPACING 1.5cm deep, 25-30cm apart, 40cm between rows

AVG. YIELD 6kg per 3m row


'Bright Lights'

Sowing and planting

Make a shallow drill in well-prepared soil in a sunny spot. Sow seeds thinly, approximately 1.5cm deep. Cover seeds with soil and water well. Sow in rows 40cm apart.

Crop care

As the seedlings begin to grow, thin out the plants so that they are 25-30cm apart. Water them well after thinning. Keep an eye out for pests, although, apart from watering, this is an easy vegetable to look after. Sow the seeds every few weeks for a continuous crop that will see you through the winter months, with just a little protection. Swiss chard can be grown successfully in containers and even among your flower borders, where it will complement the hot colours of late-summer flowers.

Harvesting

Young chard leaves are delicious eaten fresh and you can use the early thinnings for salads. The fully-formed leaves will be ready to harvest about 16 weeks after sowing, but late-summer sowings may take a little longer. Cut individual leaves as you need them and the plant will keep producing new growth.

Storage

Swiss chard is best eaten soon after picking. However, the leaves can be blanched, cooled and frozen for later use in soups.

TOP TIP

Crop rotation is important as this can prevent overwintering maggots of the beet leaf miner affecting your crop.

Troubleshooting

Swiss chard is relatively trouble-free, apart from attacks on seedlings by slugs, snails and caterpillars, so put protection in place after sowing. Some varieties, particularly ones with red stems, can be prone to bolting.

Beet leaf miner can also affect chard. These are flies whose maggots tunnel inside the leaves, creating blotches that affect growth. Tackle this by squashing the maggots in the blotchy areas, or netting crops.

Preparation and uses

Cook the leaves and stems separately as the stems are tougher. Steam, stir-fry or bake in a gratin.

5 TO TRY...

'BRIGHT LIGHTS' RHS AGM
Coloured stems ranging from red through to orange, yellow and white, with green and bronzey leaves. Good for a late-autumn harvest.

'BRIGHT YELLOW' RHS AGM
This Swiss chard has sweet-tasting golden-yellow stems, is slow to bolt and is hardy over winter.

'FANTASY'
Red-stemmed with a mild flavour and good tolerance of downy mildew. Delicious baby leaf and mature leaves.

'GREEN WAVE' RHS AGM
With green stems and leaves, this looks more like spinach. It is less prone to bolting and the flavour is a little milder.

'WHITE SILVER' RHS AGM
Has thick white stems and dark green leaves. A hardy variety, good for cropping through early winter.

Tomatoes

Speedily grown under glass, placed in cold storage and artificially ripened... it's hardly surprising that commercially grown tomatoes often taste bland. They're a world away from home-grown toms, which are juicy and have tangy flavours that develop gently over the summer as they ripen.

	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
SOW		●	●	●								
PLANT OUT					●	●						
HARVEST							●	●	●	●		

SPACING 1cm deep, 40cm apart, 40-60cm between rows

AVG. YIELD 2.75-5kg per plant

Sowing and planting

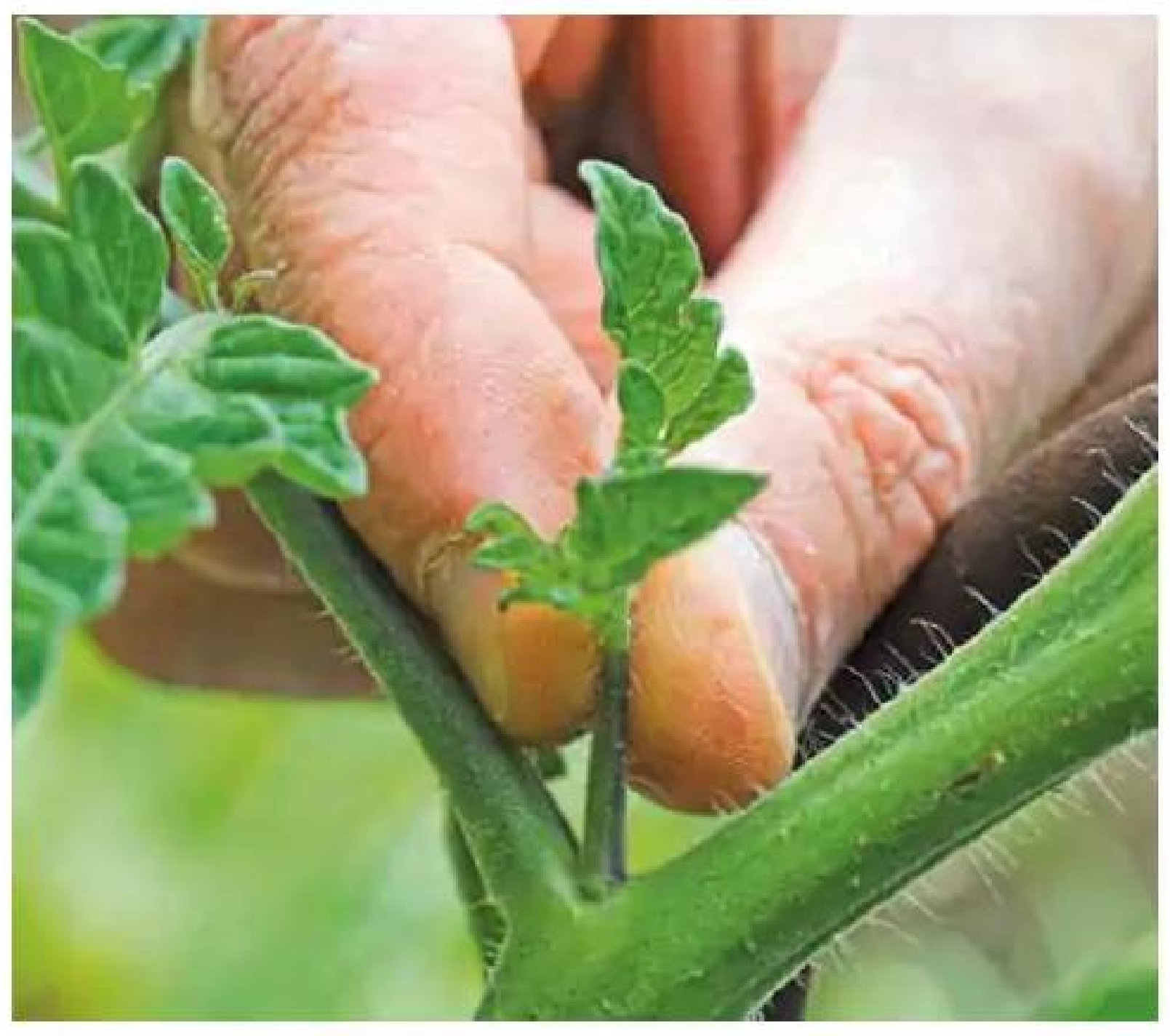
- Tomatoes grow in one of two ways – either as a bush, or trained as a cordon, which is a tall single stem.
- Sow seeds in 7.5cm pots of moist compost, top with a thin layer of vermiculite, water and cover with clingfilm. Place on a warm, bright windowsill, or in a propagator or greenhouse.
- When your seeds have germinated, remove the clingfilm or take out of the propagator, and keep the compost damp.
- Transplant seedlings when about 2-3cm high into 5cm pots of moist compost and return them to their original position. Keep potting on as necessary. Support stems by tying to a cane.
- Unless you are greenhouse growing, move plants outside after the last frost in May. Plant them in a border in a sunny, sheltered spot, or individually into 30cm pots. Alternatively, put two or three plants in a growing bag.

Crop care

Water plants regularly – irregular watering causes the fruits to split or develop hard black patches, known as blossom end rot. This is caused by a lack of calcium, which is found in water.

Once the flowers appear, feed the plants weekly with a liquid tomato food.

With tall-growing, cordon-trained tomatoes, you need to pinch out any side shoots (below) that form and regularly tie the main stem to a cane for support as it grows.



When the first fruits appear, strip away the leaves underneath to allow light and air to reach them. When there are four trusses (clusters) of flowers, pinch out the plant's growing tip. With bush tomatoes, which have a sprawling habit, you can pretty much leave them to get on with it. If the fruits are hidden under the leaves, thin out the foliage a little to let the sun through to ripen them.

Support heavy trusses on top of upturned flowerpots to prevent the stems from snapping.

'Astro Ibrido'

'Gardener's Delight'

Harvesting

Leave tomatoes on the plants so they can ripen naturally, which greatly improves the flavour. Towards the end of the season, prune off the older leaves to let in more light and stop grey mould fungus taking hold. If the weather turns cold, pick the trusses to ripen indoors.

Storage

Tomatoes are best eaten straight from the vine. They don't freeze well, but they can be stored in the fridge for up to a week.

Troubleshooting

Whitefly can be a problem in greenhouses, and blight can affect plants grown outside, especially in warm, wet summers. You can prevent blight by spraying plants with a suitable fungicide.

Preparation and uses

Most types are suitable for cooking, but plum varieties are especially so. If you have a glut, try making your own pasta sauces.

5 TO TRY...

TO GROW OUTSIDE

'ASTRO IBRIDO'

Large quantities of small to medium-sized plum tomatoes with an outstanding flavour.

'GARDENER'S DELIGHT'

A bush or cordon cherry tomato bearing heavy crops of richly flavoured fruits.

'RED CHERRY'

Produces heavy crops of sweet cherry tomatoes. Ideal for containers.

TO GROW IN A GREENHOUSE

'JULIET'

This cordon cherry plum variety has fewer seeds than most and cooks well.

'REDUNA'

This cordon variety has a delicious classic flavour and keeps well after picking.

Tomatoes are best eaten straight from the vine

Turnips

They may not have a glamorous reputation, but small, young turnips and their green leafy tops are secretly gourmet vegetables. They are one of the less troublesome members of the brassica family, and can be picked as needed all through the winter months. Delicious cooked simply as a side vegetable or added to winter stews.

	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
SOW		●	●	●	●	●	●	●				
HARVEST			●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●

SPACING 1cm deep, 15cm apart (23cm for maincrops), 30cm between rows for maincrop

AVG. YIELD 30 larger sized turnips, 48 baby turnips or 500g turnip tops per 3m row

Sowing and planting

- There are three types of turnip crop: early, maincrop and turnip tops. These can be sown at different times for a year-round crop.
- For early turnips, sow the seeds in February directly into the soil. Make a drill approximately 1cm deep and sow in rows 30cm apart. Protect these early sowings with a cloche. You can do a second sowing of early turnips from March to June.
- For maincrop turnips, sow from July to mid-August. If you are just after the leafy turnip tops, sow seeds in closer rows just 15cm apart.

Crop care

If you are growing turnips for their roots, thin seedlings to 15cm apart for the early smaller roots. Or if you want to grow showstopper-sized roots, leave a little more space – around 23cm. It's important to keep your turnip crop well-watered, especially during dry weather, because if plants dry out you may end up with small, woody veg.

Harvesting

Turnips are best harvested when young and small – about golf-ball size. If you are growing larger maincrop varieties, these can be harvested as needed, but the flavour is less sweet and the flesh less tender the longer they stay in the ground.

Storage

Turnips store well, which is why they're a useful winter staple. However, young turnips are best eaten fresh to savour the sweetness of the tender roots.

Troubleshooting

Turnips suffer from the same pests and diseases as other vegetables in the brassica family. Cabbage root fly feeds on the roots, causing stunted growth, wilting and death of the plant; it is especially dangerous for seedlings. Mesh or horticultural fleece will help stop the flies getting to the roots.

Flea beetle makes small holes in leaves and causes damaged areas to turn brown. Growing plants under horticultural fleece and keeping the soil moist can help preventthsi pest. A good fertiliser will also help, as strong plants are better able to withstand attack.

Powdery mildew affects leaves, causing them to shrivel, and occurs in dry conditions, so keep plants well-watered.

Club root disease deforms the roots and causes them to swell and makes the leaves wilt and turn yellow. There is no real cure other than to avoid growing turnips in soil that has been previously affected by club root. To help combat club root, you can improve drainage and make the soil more alkaline by adding lime, which will lessen the effects of club root on the crop.

Preparation and uses

Grate turnips raw into salads, add to stir-fries, boil or mash them.

'Tokyo Cross'

'Purple Top Milan'

TOP TIP

Growing nasturtiums among your turnips, can help draw cabbage white butterflies away from your crops.

5 TO TRY...

'GREEN GLOBE'
A maincrop variety with round white roots. Also good for turnip tops.

'OASIS' RHS AGM
Available as a summer or autumn variety with virus-resistant white roots.

'PURPLE TOP MILAN'
Fast-growing early variety with flat white roots and attractive purple tops.

'SNOWBALL'
Has a sweet flavour and delicious turnip tops. Will give a steady supply of roots from early summer to winter.

'TOKYO CROSS' RHS AGM
Fast-growing early variety with small white roots, ready 35 days after sowing.

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Grow your own Fruit

Discover all the delicious fruits you could be growing in your plot, whether it's a big garden or a tiny patio. We reveal everything you need to know to get started

Growing your own fruit has many benefits. Not only can you enjoy the exceptional flavours that a fresh harvest provides, you'll also save money and be able to enjoy varieties that aren't available in the shops.

Once established, fruit plants are less labour-intensive than veg as they require little maintenance through the summer, plus they're generally long-lived. As a rule, the bigger the plant, the longer it will take to crop, so strawberries are a good place to start if you want quick results.

Once most fruit trees or bushes are established, you should get a reliable crop every year – and when it comes to fruit there's a lot to look forward to. Enjoy tasty gooseberry fool in June, summer pudding in July made from freshly picked blackcurrants and raspberries, sun-warmed strawberries from July and sweet pears in September. Nothing is more delicious than ripe fruit at the right time of year.

Although many people have small gardens, don't let this put you off – you can grow lots of fruit in the tightest of spaces, from strawberries to blueberries in containers, or fan-trained trees such as apples and pears. Take a look through our guide to discover which fruit is perfect for your plot.

Apples

Crunching into a juicy apple is one of life's simple pleasures. And when the trees are covered in spring blossom or laden with colourful autumn fruits, they're a feast for the eyes, too.

	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
PLANT	●	●	●							●	●	●
HARVEST							●	●	●	●		

HEIGHT x SPREAD 1.5-6m x 1-4.5m

SPACING 1-9m apart

AVG. YIELD 6-55kg per tree

Planting

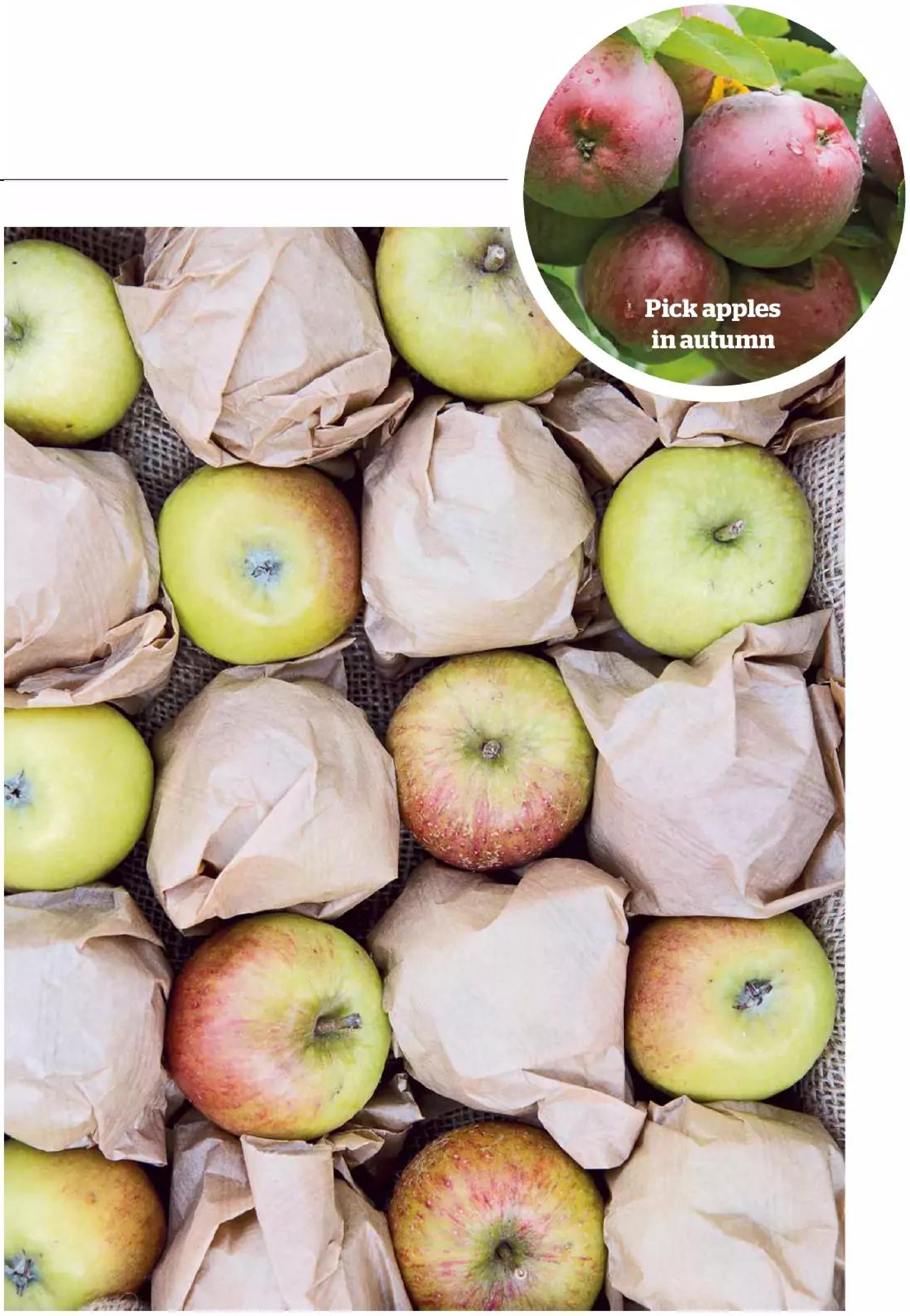
- Winter is the best time to plant bare-root apple trees. They are cheaper than container-grown ones and available in a wide range of varieties.
- Choose a site in full sun, ensuring there will be room for the branches to develop. If you have a small garden, trees can be trained and pruned as space-saving fans, cordons and espaliers against a wall, fence or trellis.
- Dig in plenty of well-rotted garden compost or manure before planting. Dig a large hole, hammer in a tree stake and position the tree. Hold the stem while you fill in around the roots with soil.
- Check that the graft point – a bulge on the stem where the rootstock was grafted on – sits just above soil level. Firm down the soil around the roots to get rid of any air pockets and secure the stem to the stake.
- Keep the tree well watered while it establishes.

Crop care

If well-maintained and fed, an apple tree will mature and crop for decades. Once a year, in late winter, apply a balanced fertiliser, such as pelleted chicken manure, around the base of the tree. Also, encourage flowering and fruiting by applying sulphate of potash fertiliser. Each spring, spread a mulch of garden compost under the tree to condition the soil, hold in moisture and suppress weeds.

Summer pruning helps to transform the new leafy shoots into fruiting ones. Prune back new shoots over 20cm long to three leaves. Cut back any side shoots from these to one leaf. Thin out congested fruits to one every 10cm, removing any damaged ones.

Remove any congested, crossing or badly placed stems in winter to create an open framework that lets light and air into the middle of the tree.



Pick apples in autumn

Harvesting

Some apples start ripening in July, but most are ready in September and October. Pick apples as they ripen to avoid fruits falling and getting damaged. Cup them in your hand and lift. If the apple doesn't pull away gently, then leave it for another week.

Storage

Late-cropping apples tend to keep better than early ones. Store only undamaged fruits, putting them in clear plastic bags (pierced with a few pinholes) in the fridge or in crates in a cool, frost-free place. Wrap some fruits in paper to stop them bruising against one another. They should keep for several months. Check them regularly and discard any with signs of rot.

Troubleshooting

Wrap a grease band around the trunk in autumn to catch winter moths. The grease also stops ants in their tracks – ants cultivate colonies of sap-sucking aphids to harvest their honeydew. Hang pheromone traps in the trees in May to catch codling moths. Woolly aphids look like white fluff on stems – scrub them off, or prune out badly affected areas.

Preparation and uses

Enjoy dessert apples as nature intended, or slice and add them to fruit salads or serve with wedges of cheese. Use cooking apples in pies and crumbles, baked or puréed as the basis of apple sauce.

Rootstocks

Named varieties are grown on rootstocks that control their vigour and ultimate size. So, as well as choosing a tasty apple, you should also select a suitable rootstock for your space. They are:

- M27 very dwarfing
- M9 and M26 dwarfing
- MM106 semi-dwarf
- MM111 vigorous

5 TO TRY...

'ARTHUR TURNER'
An early cooker with yellow skin and a lovely sharp tang.

'BENENDEN EARLY'
A large dessert, ready from August to September.

'BRAMLEY'S SEEDLING'
The classic cooker, green with a red blush. It stores well.

'EGREMONT RUSSET'
Popular for its distinctive flavour. Late-ripening, this variety keeps until Christmas.

'ELLISON'S ORANGE'
Aromatic flavour, best eaten fresh in September/October.

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BBC Gardeners' World magazine GUIDE

Blackberries

A short shelf life and fancy packaging make succulent blackberries expensive to buy. Wild brambles may be free, but their fruit size and flavour doesn't compare to a cultivated blackberry.

	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
PLANT	●	●	●							●	●	●
HARVEST							●	●	●			

HEIGHT x SPREAD 1.8m x 1.8m

SPACING 1.5m apart, 2m between rows

AVG. YIELD 6-9kg per 3m row

Planting

- ● Vigorous rather than rampant, cultivated blackberries are more civilised than their wild cousins. Tie the canes as they grow on to a system of wires against a wall or fence.
- ● Although fairly unfussy, blackberries will reward you with bumper crops if given full sun and free-draining soil enriched with garden compost.
- ● Buy bare-root plants – called stools – in winter. Soak before planting and bury each stool up to the old soil mark and firm it in. Water in well.
- ● Spacing is usually 1.5m but this depends on the vigour of the cultivar – check this with the nursery.

Crop care

Blackberries fruit on two-year-old canes. When you tie them in, keep new growth separate from the older fruiting canes to prevent any fungal diseases spreading from older foliage. In the first spring, when new canes emerge from the base of the stools, cut back any old wood to soil level. Tie in the new canes as they grow. The second summer you could be tying in numerous canes; flowers then fruits will follow. Keep well-watered during this period.

Pruning

After fruiting, cut fruited (i.e. two-year-old) canes down to soil level. Cover the cut ends with compost so they rot down quickly. Tie in the next lot of canes when they appear in spring. Every few years in late winter, spread a thick layer of well-rotted garden compost or farmyard manure over the root area.

Harvesting

For maximum sweetness, let the fruits swell to full ripeness. Gently pull them off the canes and pop them into a shallow dish to avoid crushing them – watch that the juice doesn't stain your clothing.

Storage

Blackberries bruise very easily and won't keep fresh for very long. They do, however, freeze well.

Troubleshooting

If you don't have a cage to protect the fruit from hungry birds, wait until the flowers have been pollinated, then drape some fleece over the plants.Take care that the growing tips of the canes don't touch the ground or they will quickly take root. If suckers are thrown up from the stool below soil level, pull them off or they will weaken the plant.

Preparation and uses

Wash well and remove the hull (stem) before using to make summer pudding, purées, jams, pies, crumbles and wine.

'Adrienne'

'Loch Ness'

TOP TIP

If you notice a decline in the vigour of blackberry canes, feed them with pelleted chicken manure.

5 TO TRY...

'ADRIENNE'
Delicious fruit on strong, thornless stems.

'BLACK BUTTE'
Huge berries up to 5cm long and weighing up to 12g each.

'LOCH MAREE'
Pretty pink flowers, followed by a good crop of berries. Thorn-free and ideal in a pot.

'LOCH NESS'
Vigorous, with high yields of large fruits on long, thornless canes.

'MERTON THORNLESS'
Large crops of well-flavoured berries, this compact variety is thornless.

Blueberries

Blueberries are not only delicious and highly nutritious, they are also attractive shrubs in their own right, with white spring flowers and lovely autumn leaf colour. They are easy to grow, given the right conditions, either in the garden or in containers. It's definitely worth making space for them, as little beats the taste of this fresh home-grown superfood packed with vitamins and antioxidants.

	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
PLANT	●	●	●								●	●
HARVEST							●	●	●			

HEIGHT x SPREAD 1.8m x 2m

SPACING Plant in containers of at least 30cm diameter, 50cm pots for mature plants; in borders space at least 1.2m apart

AVG. YIELD 2.25-5kg per plant

Planting

- Plant blueberries in autumn or winter in full sun or light shade.
- The key to growing blueberries successfully is getting the soil conditions right. They need acidic soil, with a pH of between 4 and 5.5, and the texture should be light and free-draining, with lots of organic matter added to it.
- If you don't have this type of soil in your garden, you can create a bed filled with ericaceous compost specifically for your blueberry bushes. Or grow them in large containers – blueberries generally do very well in pots.

Crop care

Water blueberries regularly, with rainwater rather than tap water whenever possible. Tap water contains lime and this can change the pH of the soil over time. A change in soil acidity levels can cause blueberry leaves to yellow with chlorosis.

A spring mulch of pine tree needles or chippings is one way of maintaining soil acidity.

If your blueberries are in pots, give them a feed with an ericaceous liquid plant food once a month during the growing season.

Pruning

Blueberries don't need pruning in their first two years, but they do benefit from regular winter pruning once established to keep the bushes healthy and productive. Fruit is produced on branches from the previous year's growth, so take this into account when pruning and follow the usual rules of removing older, dying and very low-hanging branches.

Harvesting

You can start harvesting blueberries from mid-summer. The round berries are ready to pick when they have turned from green to the characteristic deep blue. The berries will ripen over a few weeks, so you can pick them regularly.

Harvest from mid-summer

TOP TIP

Although a lone blueberry bush will bear some fruit, growing two or more to pollinate each other will provide you with a heavier crop to enjoy.

Storage

Blueberries are best eaten freshly picked, but they can be frozen. Frozen blueberries are good for jams, baking and smoothies.

Troubleshooting

Blueberries do not generally suffer from many pests and diseases. Look out for common problems like powdery mildew, vine weevil and aphids on new young shoots.

The biggest pests are birds, so take precautions against them by netting your blueberry bushes.

Look out for yellowing leaves that can be a sign of chlorosis – this occurs due to a change in the pH of the soil. To treat, top up pots with new compost, water with rainwater and add a liquid fertiliser for ericaceous plants.

Preparation and uses

The fruits are just as delicious hot as they are cold. Enjoy freshly picked berries or try them baked into cakes or muffins.

5 TO TRY...

'BRIGITTA'
Produces large fruits that ripen later in the season. Grow with other varieties, as it needs cross-pollination.

'DUKE' RHS AGM
This flowers later but fruits early, so it's good for areas with a short summer season.

'EARLIBLUE'
An early-ripening variety, bearing large, sweet light blue berries.

'SPARTAN' RHS AGM
This early- to mid-season cropper produces good crops of large, juicy fruits.

'PINK SAPPHIRE'
An unusual variety with pink-white flowers in spring and deep pink ripe berries.

Cherries

Cherry trees are wonderful for all sizes of garden, and many varieties have the magic combination of attractive blossom, bark, foliage and delicious fruit. They can be grown in containers, as free-standing trees or fan-trained against a wall. They do require careful maintenance, but having freshly picked cherries is worth the effort.

	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
PLANT	●	●	●							●	●	●
HARVEST						●	●	●	●			

HEIGHT x SPREAD Dwarf 3m x 3m in 10 years; semi-vigorous 4-5m x 4-5m

SPACING 1.5m apart

AVG. YIELD 5.5-15kg per tree

'Avium'

'Morello'

Planting

- Cherry trees like a warm, sheltered, frost-free spot and well-drained, slightly acid soil.
- There are two types of fruiting cherry tree – sweet and acid. The acid cherry varieties are generally smaller and tolerate some shade, so can be grown against a north-facing boundary. These varieties are also self-fertile.
- Sweet cherries can be grown free-standing in larger spaces. Dwarf varieties can be fan-trained against a warm wall, or grown in containers, but they require plenty of sun.
- Some sweet cultivars need to be planted with a partner for pollination, so check when you choose your tree.
- Plant in winter when trees are dormant. Dig over the soil, adding well-rotted manure to the planting hole. You may need to use a stake to support a young tree.

Crop care

Care at the start of the growing season is important for cherries, as they flower early. Give the roots a good mulch with well-rotted manure or garden compost in February and feed regularly with a general fertiliser through to the end of March. Keep the trees well watered at this early stage of growth. If frost is forecast, it's vital to protect any early blossom with horticultural fleece.

Net your trees in summer to protect the fruit from birds. After the fruit has been picked, you can think about pruning them.

Pruning

Cherries are traditionally grown as either free-standing trees or are fan-trained against a wall or fence. Sweet cherries bear their fruit on wood produced the previous season or earlier, while acid cherries fruit on one-year-old wood.

Pruning should be carried out to balance old and new growth, to remove dead, diseased and dying branches and to shape the tree. The golden rule for all types of cherry is never prune in winter, as this puts the tree at risk of developing silver leaf disease or canker. As a general rule, prune young trees in spring when new growth appears, while established trees should be pruned in summer, if needed.

Harvesting

Cut bunches of cherries from the tree, with stalks intact, taking care not to bruise the fruits.

Storage

Sweet cherries are best eaten fresh, but they will store in the fridge for about a week after picking.

Troubleshooting

Cherries are prone to cherry blackfly and fruit fly – maggots invade the fruit and cause rotting. These insects can be controlled by encouraging natural predators like blue tits. When the fruits have formed, net your crop to prevent birds eating the bounty.

Diseases to look out for include canker, blossom wilt and silver leaf. Silver leaf can be managed by pruning in spring and summer.

Preparation and uses

Acid varieties can be used in cakes and tarts and make a very tasty jam.

5 TO TRY...

PRUNUS AVIUM
This wild cherry can reach up to 20m high. It produces delicious red-purple fruits in summer.

'MORELLO' RHS AGM
This variety can be planted on its own as it is self-fertile. It bears lots of sweet fruit in July and August.

'SUNBURST'
A self-fertile cherry, with sweet-tasting, almost black fruits ripening in mid-summer. Ideal for growing on a patio.

'SWEETHEART'
A dark red cherry with a very good flavour. A late, self-fertile variety, producing fruit through to September.

'SYLVIA'
Perfect for large containers, this produces sweet cherries and is a self-fertile cultivar.

TOP TIP

If frost is forecast during flowering time, cover plants with horticultural fleece to protect the blossom.

Currants: black, red & white

These juicy berries, packed with vitamin C, are a real treat – make them into summer puddings or serve freshly picked with ice cream. With their stems dripping with jewel-bright fruits, they make an attractive shrub for any garden border.

	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
PLANT	●	●	●							●	●	●
HARVEST						●	●	●				

HEIGHT x SPREAD Varies depending on type

SPACING Plant level with or deeper than rootball, space 1.5m apart, 1.8m between rows

AVG. YIELD 4-5kg per bush

Planting

- Despite being closely related, redcurrants and whitecurrants have a different growth habit to blackcurrants. All three will tolerate most soils, apart from wet or poorly drained. They prefer a sunny spot that's sheltered from cold winds, but red- and whitecurrants will cope with partial shade.
- Bare-root plants can be planted between October and early March in mild spells. Pot-grown plants can go in any time.
- Prepare the soil by digging in organic matter, such as well-rotted garden compost. Add a general-purpose fertiliser (follow the pack instructions) to the planting hole.
- Blackcurrants like to go in deep – 6cm deeper than the soil mark on the stem. Redcurrants and whitecurrants prefer to have the top of their rootball level with the surface. Firm down the soil around the roots and water well. Leave 1.5m between the plants and 1.8m between rows.
- After planting, cut back the stems of blackcurrants to one bud above ground level to encourage new growth. If planted in summer, wait until winter before doing this.

Crop care

Feed plants with pelleted chicken manure in spring, then cover the roots with a 5cm mulch of garden compost to hold in moisture and suppress weeds. While blackcurrants are hungry plants, redcurrants and whitecurrants will grow too fast if overfed.

Water in dry spells, but not while the fruits are ripening, as this may cause the skins to split.

Blackcurrants fruit on young wood. For the first two years, remove any weak or whippy shoots; after that, remove a quarter of the two-year-old (grey) stems and older (black) ones in winter, cutting back to the base.

Red- and whitecurrants fruit on old wood. Cut back old or diseased stems in winter; prune new growth back to two buds (to keep the plant compact) at the end of June.

Redcurrants fruit on old wood

Harvesting

Pick whole trusses, rather than individual berries. They're ready to pick when they've coloured up but are still firm and shiny. Harvest on a dry day, as wet currants will quickly go mouldy.

Storage

Store unwashed bunches of currants in the fridge for up to five days. They also freeze well.

Troubleshooting

Put netting over bushes to stop birds stripping the fruit. Blackcurrant gall midge causes leaves to dry and drop off – control it with an insecticidal soap.

Preparation and uses

To prepare currants, strip them from the stalks by pushing a fork down the length of each bunch. Sprigs of currants make a pretty garnish, although you may need a sprinkle of sugar to take the edge off their tartness. Cook them in pies and sauces or make into jams and jellies.

5 TO TRY...

BLACKCURRANTS
'BEN NEVIS'
Pick the well-flavoured fruits in late July. This variety is frost- and mildew-resistant.

'BEN SAREK'
A compact plant producing a heavy crop in July. Resistant to mildew, frost and leaf-curling midge.

REDCURRANTS
'ROVADA'
This late summer-ripening variety bears heavy crops of big berries on long trusses.

'STANZA'
Compact plant, so ideal for small gardens. Produces a large mid-season crop.

WHITECURRANTS
'BLANKA'
The heaviest-cropping whitecurrant, with long trusses of large white berries.

Figs

Fresh figs are delicious nectar-rich treats, a real taste of sunny climes. While fig trees in Britain might not yield the same quantity or sweetness of fig trees in the Mediterranean, they can be grown successfully in a sheltered, sunny spot against a wall. They are worth the effort, and the attractive foliage is a good addition to the garden.

	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
PLANT			●	●					●	●	●	
HARVEST							●	●	●			

HEIGHT x SPREAD Up to 2m x 3-3.5m

SPACING 3-5m apart

AVG. YIELD Up to 50 fruits per tree in a warm summer

Planting

- Figs are best planted outdoors in autumn; if growing in containers plant them in spring. Only a few varieties are hardy enough for outdoor cultivation in the UK. They need a sheltered, sunny spot, ideally against a wall so they can soak up the summer heat.
- Fig trees benefit from having their roots restricted. *Ficus carica* is native to Syria and Iran, and the idea is to trick the plant into thinking it is growing on a rocky hilltop in the eastern Mediterranean. This allows the tree to concentrate on making fruit, rather than growing leaves.
- Dig a 60cm square pit and fill it with well-composted manure and rubble. Line it with paving slabs to really restrict the roots. The same effect can be achieved by growing figs in containers.

Crop care

Figs produce small fruits in spring that will ripen over a hot summer. Fruitlets that appear in late summer can be left on the tree over winter to ripen into edible fruits the following year. When fruits start appearing, feed with a liquid tomato feed every couple of weeks.

In some areas, fig trees will need protection over winter. When the leaves have dropped, cover with horticultural fleece and pack straw around the branches of fan-trained specimens. Move pot-grown figs into a cool shed or covered area.

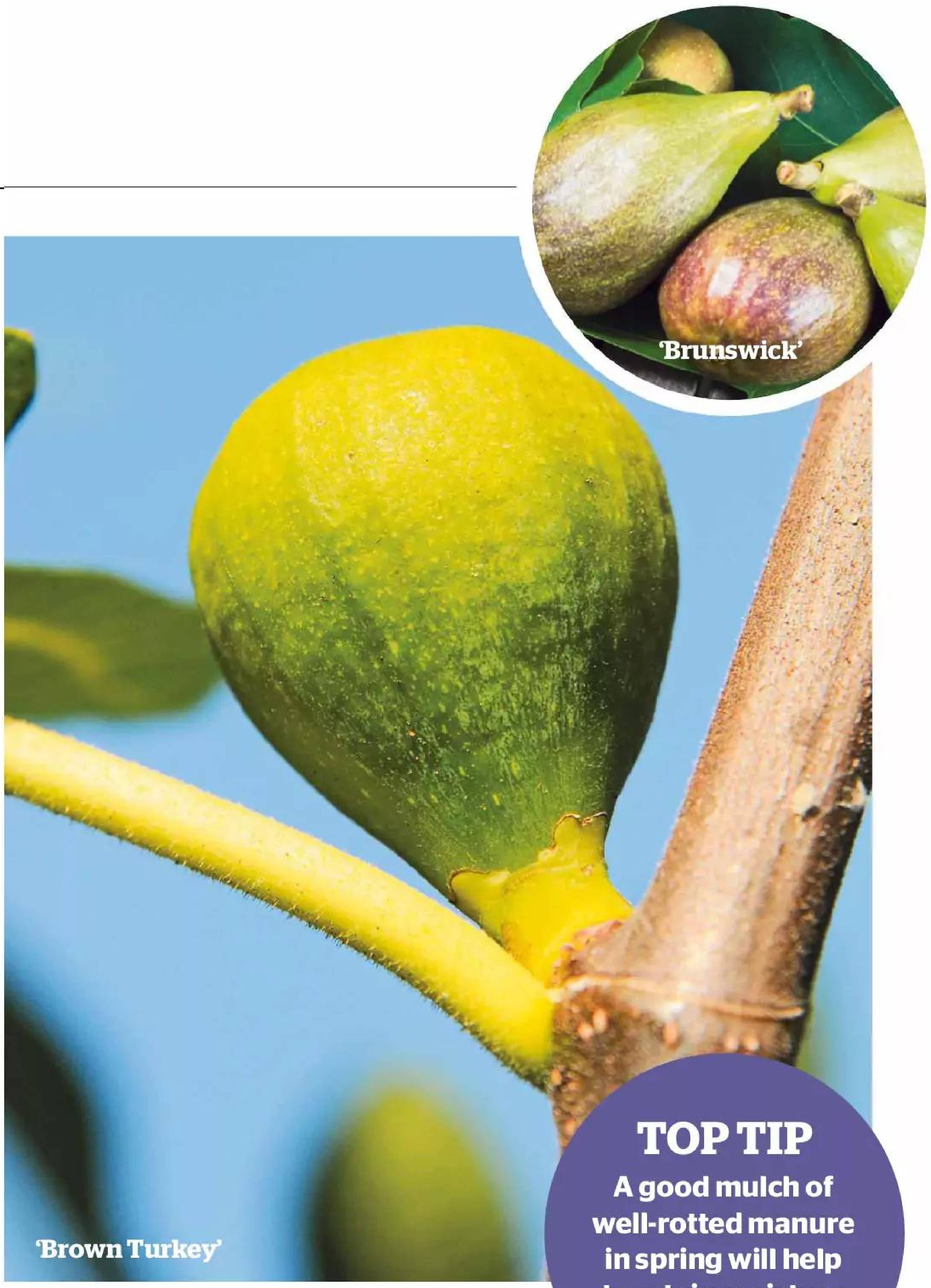
Remove the protection in spring, give the trees a good feed and mulch with well-composted manure.

For pot-grown fig trees, move them back outdoors when there is no chance of any further frosts. Container-grown figs should be repotted every two years.

Pruning and training

Outdoor figs can be fan-trained to help create space and light for fruits to ripen. Train against the wall on horizontal wires, tying in the stems to create a fan shape. In early summer, pinch out half the growing tips on the main frame of the fan to encourage growth lower down. Tie in the new shoots as they appear. Cut out any dead or crossing stems in late winter to keep the framework of the tree open.

Prune container-grown fig trees in a similar way, by removing dead and weak branches in late winter and new shoot tips in summer.



'Brunswick'

'Brown Turkey'

Harvesting

Outdoor figs are ready in summer through to the end of September. Look for soft skin that may split when squeezed. You may get two crops in a greenhouse in summer.

Storage

Best enjoyed freshly picked.

Troubleshooting

Figs are popular with birds and squirrels – use deterrents or netting to protect them.

Preparation and uses

Eat on their own or pair with cheese.

TOP TIP

A good mulch of well-rotted manure in spring will help to retain moisture and keep weeds at bay.

5 TO TRY...

'BROWN TURKEY'
Probably the most popular for outdoor growing, because it is both prolific and reliable.

'BRUNSWICK'
A hardy variety that will grow outdoors in the UK.It's a heavy cropper with sweet fruits that have yellow and red flesh.

'MADELEINE DES DEUX SAISONS'
A hardy heritage variety with sweet pink flesh. It will produce two crops per season during hot UK summers.

'OSBORNE PROLIFIC'
This variety is a good cropper, as its name suggests, with red-brown to bronze fruits.

'WHITE MARSEILLES'
Produces large fruits and can be grown in containers and outdoors. It will crop twice a year in a greenhouse.

Gooseberries

The plump fruits of a gooseberry bush are delicious in pies and fools. They are easy to grow, and just a single bush will reward you with masses of berries for up to 15 years.

	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
PLANT	●	●	●	●	●				●	●	●	●
HARVEST							●	●				

HEIGHT x SPREAD 1.5m x 1.5m

SPACING 1.5m apart

AVG. YIELD 3.5kg per bush

Planting

- Gooseberries aren't fussy when it comes to soil type, but they do prefer it to be free-draining and contain plenty of well-rotted manure or garden compost. Full sun is best, especially for the sweeter dessert varieties, but they're very tolerant of shade.
- Spring or autumn is the best time to plant bare-root bushes. Space them 1.5m apart, with a gap of 1.5m between the rows.
- Gooseberries grow well in large containers of soil-based compost. Mulch the surface to keep weeds at bay.

Crop care

Feed in early spring with sulphate of potash (follow packet instructions) and apply a thick mulch of well-rotted manure or compost. Water well during dry spells.

Pruning

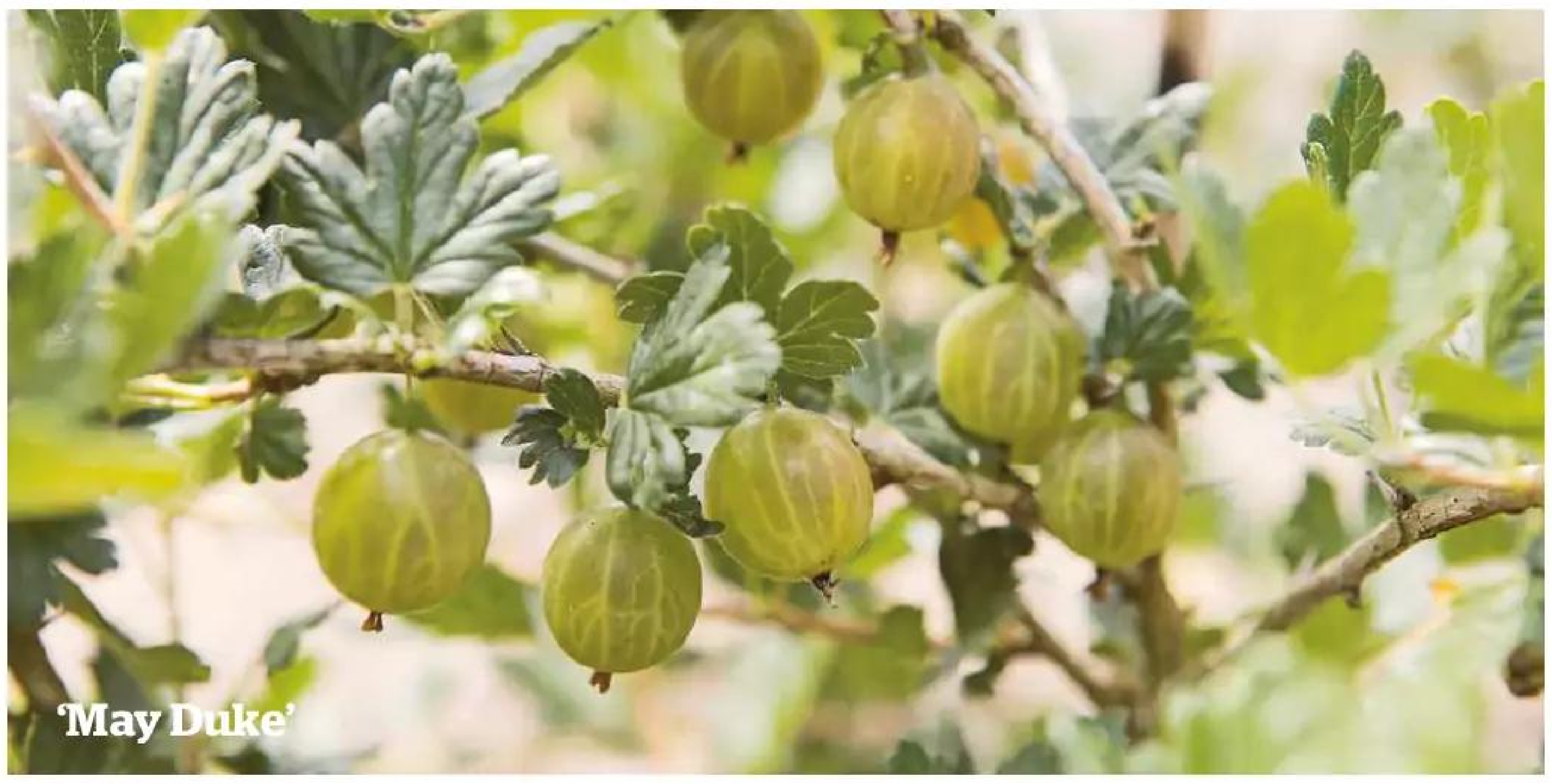
Pruning is easy. In July or August, simply cut back this season's soft growth to two or three leaves from the base. To prevent mildew, keep the centre of the bush open. Although usually grown as bushes, gooseberries can be trained as single upright stems or cordons, as well as fans on walls or fences. This makes the fruit easier to pick from thorny stems.

Harvesting

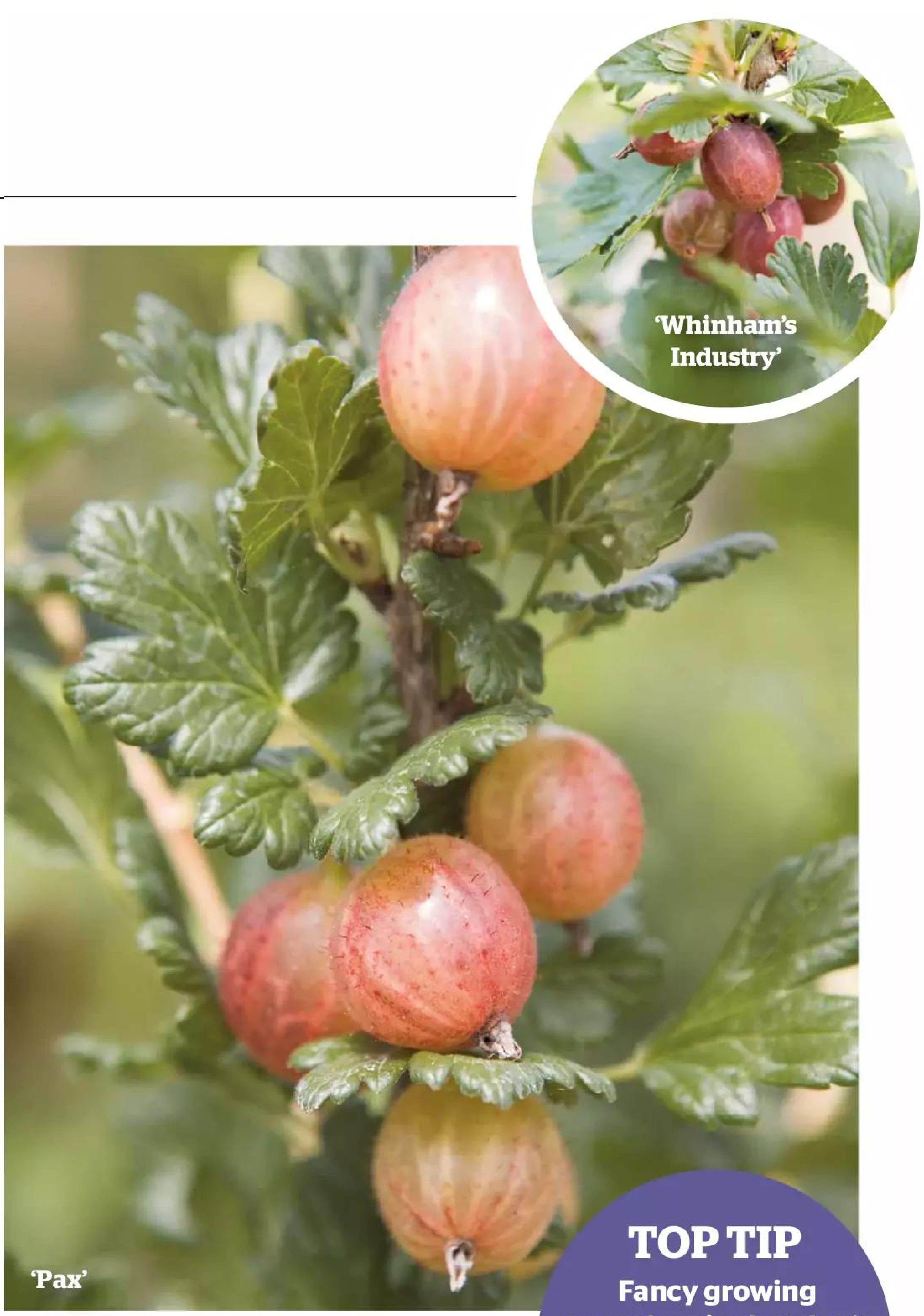
Most gooseberries are ready to pick in July or August, but to ensure good-sized berries, thin out in June when the fruits are the size of peas. These thinnings make wonderfully tart stewed fruit.

Storage

Eat within days of picking or store in the fridge for up to two weeks. Gooseberries also freeze well.



'May Duke'

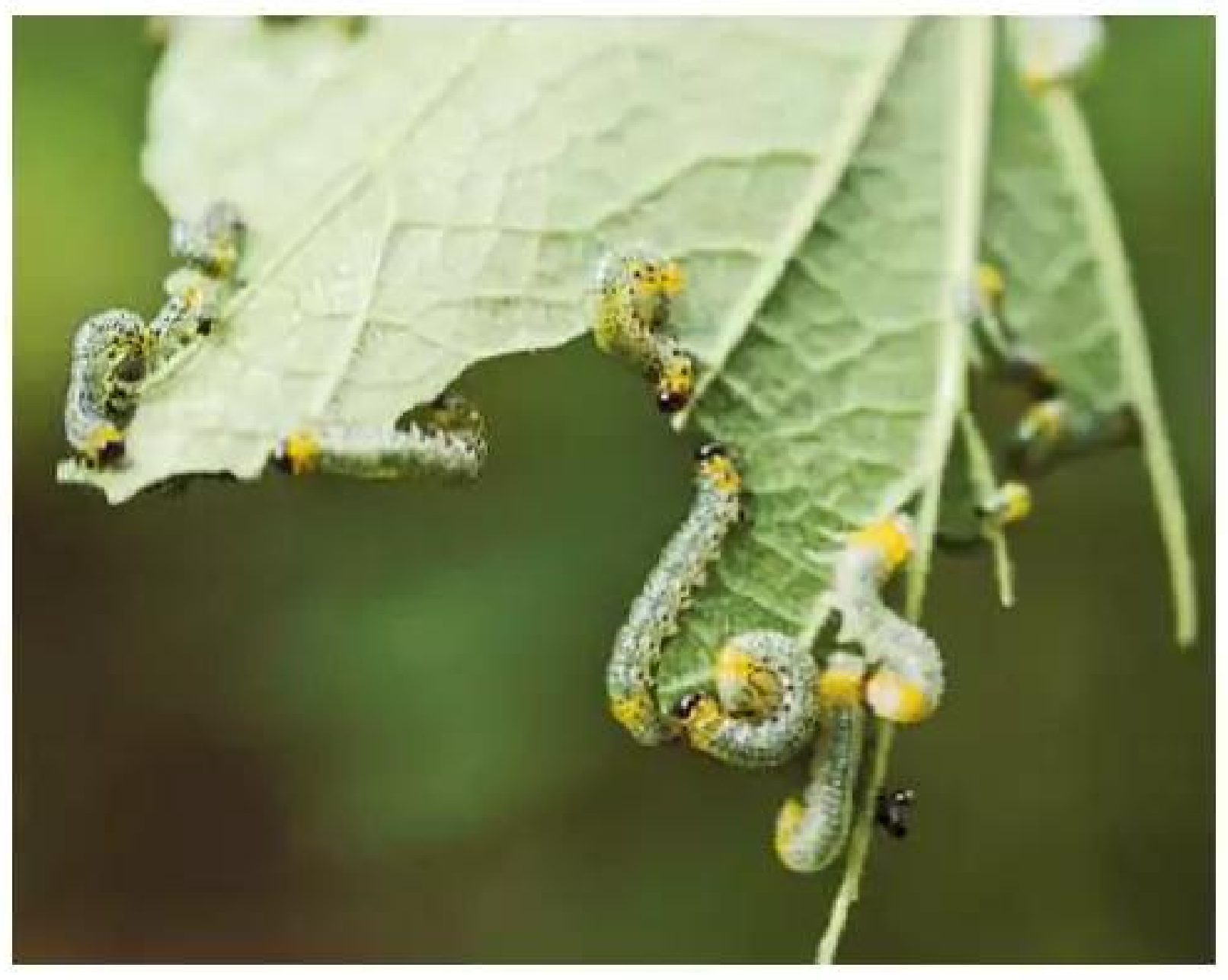


'Pax'

'Whinham's Industry'

TOP TIP

Fancy growing gooseberries but don't have much room? Then train them in a fan shape against a wall, fence or trellis.



Troubleshooting

Net the bushes when the fruits start to ripen to protect them from birds. Gooseberry plants are susceptible to mildew, so choose resistant varieties, avoid planting in shallow, dry soil and cut out affected shoots. From mid-spring, look out for gooseberry sawfly larvae (above), which will quickly strip a bush. Pick off and squish them or use a biological control.

Preparation and uses

Ideally, eat the berries on the day you pick them. Simply top and tail before eating. Delicious in fresh fruit salads, cooked in pies or stewed to make purées, jams and chutneys.

5 TO TRY...

'CARELESS'
Large, juicy fruits that turn transparent when ripe.

'INVICTA'
Mildew-resistant green cooking berry; big crops.

'MAY DUKE'
Early variety with smooth dark red fruits; crops heavily.

'PAX'
Sweet red berries on almost spine-free stems.

'WHINHAM'S INDUSTRY'
Red dessert variety with large sweet berries. Shade-tolerant and copes with heavy soil.

Grapes

Grapes are often thought unsuitable for the UK climate, but there are varieties that will flourish in warmer areas. They can be grown successfully in greenhouses, and dessert grapes give better results under cover, as the fruit needs plenty of warmth to ripen fully. Whether fruitful or not, a vine makes an attractive climber with distinctive foliage that often colours up beautifully in autumn.

	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
PLANT OUT	●	●	●							●	●	●
HARVEST								●	●	●	●	

HEIGHT x SPREAD Varies depending on type

SPACING Place vines 12.5cm away from a wall or fence, 1.2m apart; or in the ground space 1.2-1.5m apart, 1.5-1.8m between rows

AVG. YIELD 8-10 bunches of grapes from a mature cordon

Planting

- Grapevines are grafted onto rootstocks. When you buy a grapevine, you'll see the join clearly visible, above the line of the soil in the pot. When you plant out your vine, this should remain above the soil.
- Choose a warm, sunny site, either against a wall or fence or with some other support. Vines will grow on most free-draining soils, provided they get plenty of sunlight. They can be grown successfully outdoors, but some varieties will crop more reliably if they have the heat and shelter of a greenhouse.
- The roots need plenty of space and good drainage – cold won't affect growth, but damp roots will not make for a happy grapevine. So whether you are growing outdoors or indoors, prepare the soil well, digging a generous hole and adding extra crocks and grit for drainage, plus a good helping of well-rotted manure or garden compost.
- If you are growing grapes outdoors, leave approximately 12.5cm between the vine and the wall or fence that it will grow against.

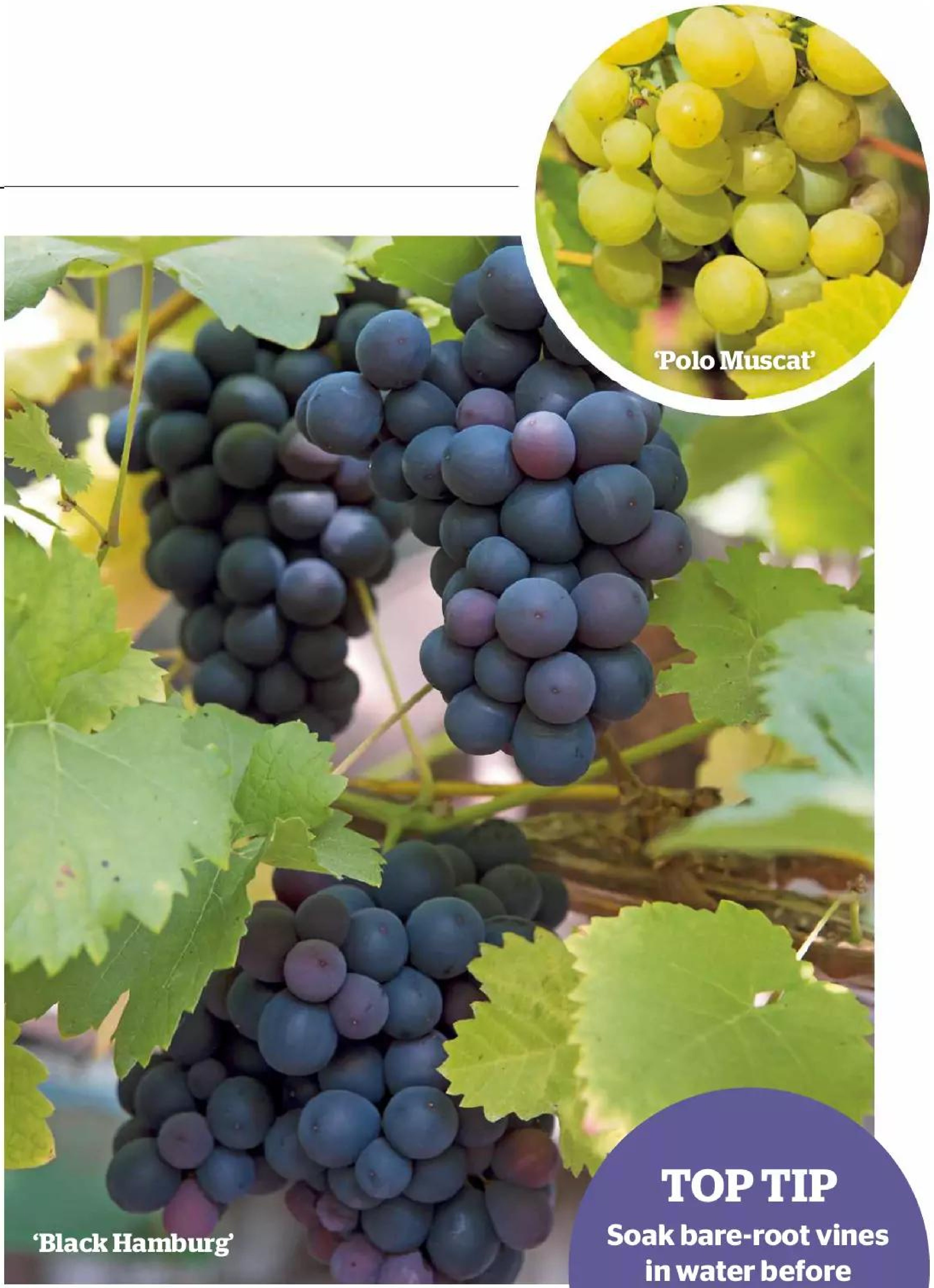
Crop care

Grapes don't need much watering if grown outdoors, but they are hungry plants. Give an annual mulch of well-rotted manure in early spring, with a scattering of blood fish and bone before they start growing. In early summer use a tomato feed every few weeks. If you are growing dessert grapes, feed weekly until they start to ripen.

For newly planted grapevines, remove any flowers in the first two years. In the next three years, leave only a few bunches on the vine until established, at about five years old.

Pruning and training

Vines can be trained up walls and trellis and need little space if pruned carefully. In the first year, restrict growth to three vertical stems. Tie in the stems in autumn, pruning one back to encourage growth next year. Keep stems well spaced to encourage air to circulate and allow room for the fruits to ripen. Pinch out side shoots as needed in spring.



'Polo Muscat'

'Black Hamburg'

Thin the fruits in mid-summer with special long scissors.

Harvesting

If you have a good summer, the grapes will be ready from August. You will know when they are ready to pick by the colour and taste.

Storage

Eat fairly soon after picking, but they will keep for a week in the fridge.

Troubleshooting

Grey mould can occur in wet conditions or where there is not enough air around plants. It affects the buds, leaves, flowers and fruit and can be fatal for weak plants. If spotted, remove the affected areas and burn them. Powdery mildew can appear on the leaves, affecting growth. Some varieties, however, are mildew-resistant.

Preparation and uses

Eat fresh in puds or salads, cook with chicken, or you could make your own wine.

TOP TIP

Soak bare-root vines in water before planting and plant in the sunniest spot you have available.

5 TO TRY...

'BLACK HAMBURG'
Produces delicious dark dessert grapes, but is best grown in a greenhouse.

'BRANT'
A tough, vigorous variety suitable for outdoor growing. Not great for eating but good for wine making.

'FOSTER SEEDLING'
This heavy cropper produces delicious green grapes and is best grown indoors.

'MUSCAT BLEU'
A very dark, almost black grape. Bred to be disease-resistant and produce high-quality fruit outdoors.

'POLO MUSCAT'
A green variety that can be grown outdoors in most of the UK. It's mildew-resistant and bears lots of sweet fruit.

Kiwi fruits

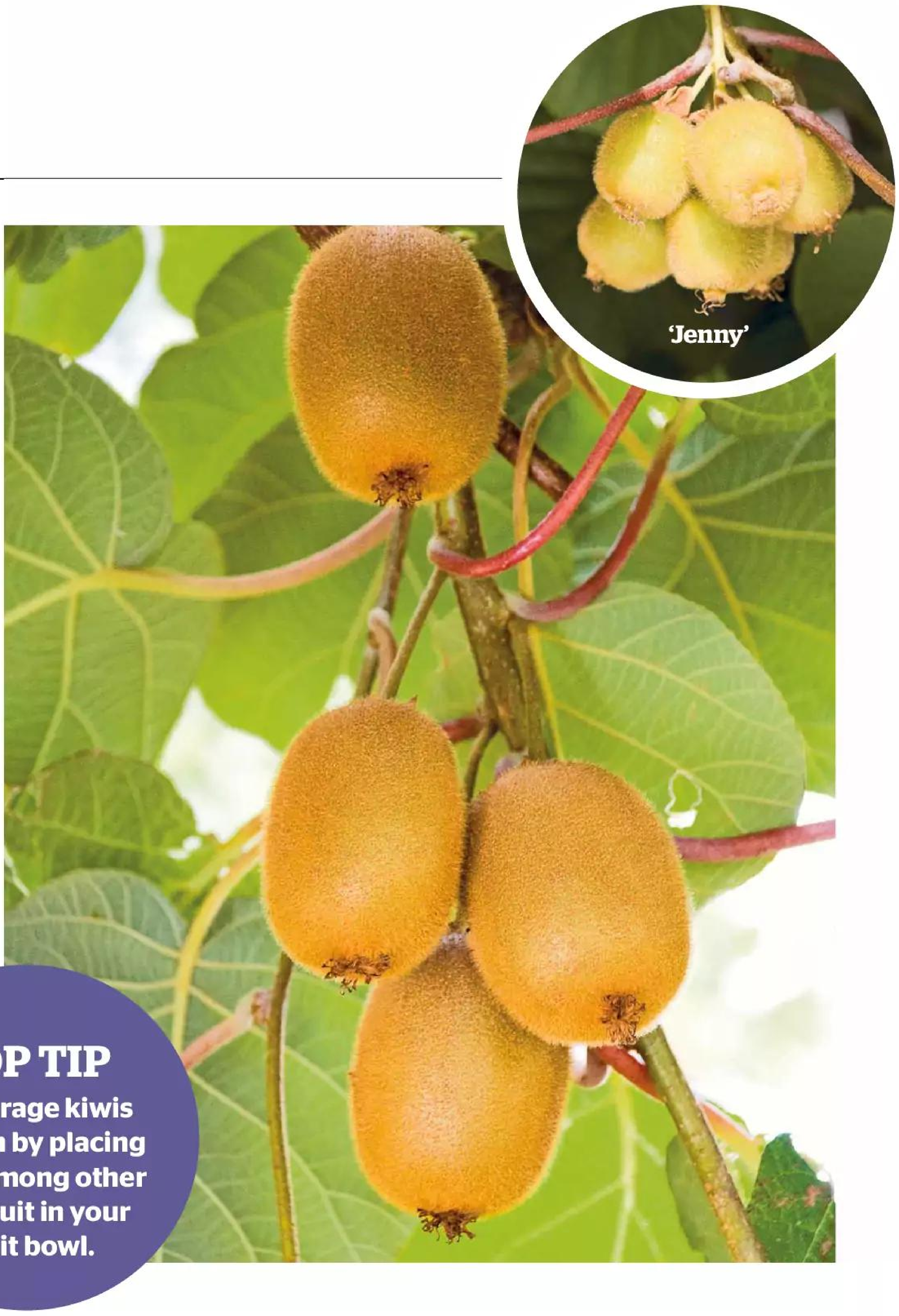
Home-grown kiwi fruits are delicious and rich in vitamin C. As an added bonus, the kiwi vine is ornamental as well as productive – the vigorous, deciduous climber has attractive heart-shaped foliage and white flowers. Kiwis can be planted to cover a wall, fence, pergola or an unsightly shed, as long as they get plenty of sunshine and warmth.

	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
PLANT			●	●	●							
HARVEST								●	●	●		

HEIGHT x SPREAD 6m x 4m

SPACING 3-4.5m apart

AVG. YIELD 2-4kg of fruit per vine



Planting

- You'll generally need to plant a male and a female kiwi cultivar to ensure good pollination and a decent crop. However, if you're short on the amount of space required for two vines, you can opt for a self-fertile variety.
- Choose a sunny, sheltered spot with rich, fertile soil for your kiwi vine to thrive.
- Dig a generous hole for your plant, adding a few spadefuls of well-rotted manure. If you have room for a male and female vine, make sure they are planted a few metres apart so they have plenty of room to climb.

Crop care

Despite being an exotic fruit, kiwis are relatively easy to look after. They benefit from a good mulch in spring and a regular weekly feed with a general-purpose fertiliser through the growing season.

TOP TIP

Encourage kiwis to ripen by placing them among other ripe fruit in your fruit bowl.

Harvesting

Kiwi vines take up to four years to produce fruit, so they are a long-term investment. The fruits should be picked in August to October and left to ripen off the vine over a few weeks.

Storage

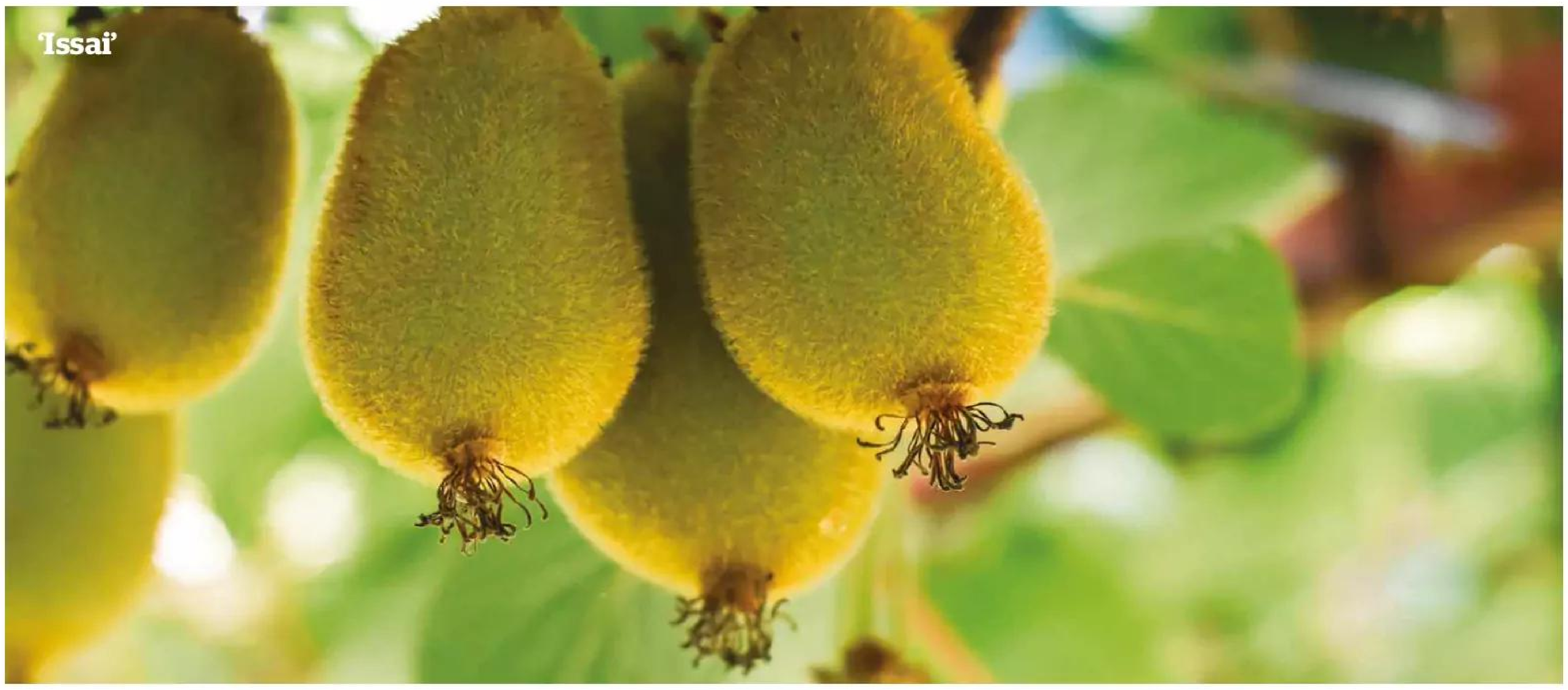
Store fruits in a cool place or in the fridge for up to three months.

Troubleshooting

Kiwi fruits are relatively trouble-free in terms of pests and diseases. However, young shoots can be prone to damage in cold weather, so protect with horticultural fleece.

Preparation and uses

Delicious raw, in smoothies or baked in cakes.



5 TO TRY...

'HAYWARD'
A female cultivar and the most widely grown kiwi fruit. It is late-flowering and produces large fruits.

'ISSAI'
This hardy, self-fertile variety bears small, sweet fruits the size of grapes. They ripen slightly earlier.

'JENNY'
The only self-fertile, hardy kiwi variety. The fruits are ready to harvest in August and September.

SOLISSIMO
A late-ripening, self-fertile variety with sweet fruit from October. Attractive leaves.

'TORMURI'
A male cultivar, suitable for planting with 'Hayward' for cross-pollination.

Peaches & nectarines

Delicious as they are, the flavour of imported peaches and nectarines can't compare with the fruits you can grow in your garden. They need lots of sun though, ideally in a pot on a sheltered patio or trained against a sunny wall.

	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
PLANT	●	●	●								●	●
HARVEST						●	●	●	●			

HEIGHT x SPREAD Fans 1.8m x 3.5m

SPACING 3.6-4.5m apart

AVG. YIELD 5.5-11kg per fan

Planting

- Bare-root trees should be planted on a mild day, any time from November to March. Container-grown trees can go in at any time of year.
- Although they're hardy in the UK (apart from the far north), the blossom and young fruits are vulnerable to frost. Grow trees against a south- or west-facing wall, or in a pot that you can move under cover for winter.
- Peaches and nectarines will tolerate most soils, but dig in plenty of well-rotted garden compost or manure before planting. For clay soil, improve drainage by filling the base of the planting hole with rubble.
- Both fruits have identical growing needs, but peaches are slightly hardier than nectarines. Nectarines grow best when trained against a warm wall or fence in a sunny, sheltered position.
- Plant a tree so the top of the rootball sits level with the soil surface and the stem is at least 20cm away from the wall. Make a wire framework to tie in the stems as they grow.
- To plant a tree in a pot, fill the base with pea gravel (to improve drainage and stability) and fill with a soil-based compost. Leave a gap between the compost and top of the pot for easy watering. Never let the compost dry out.

Crop care

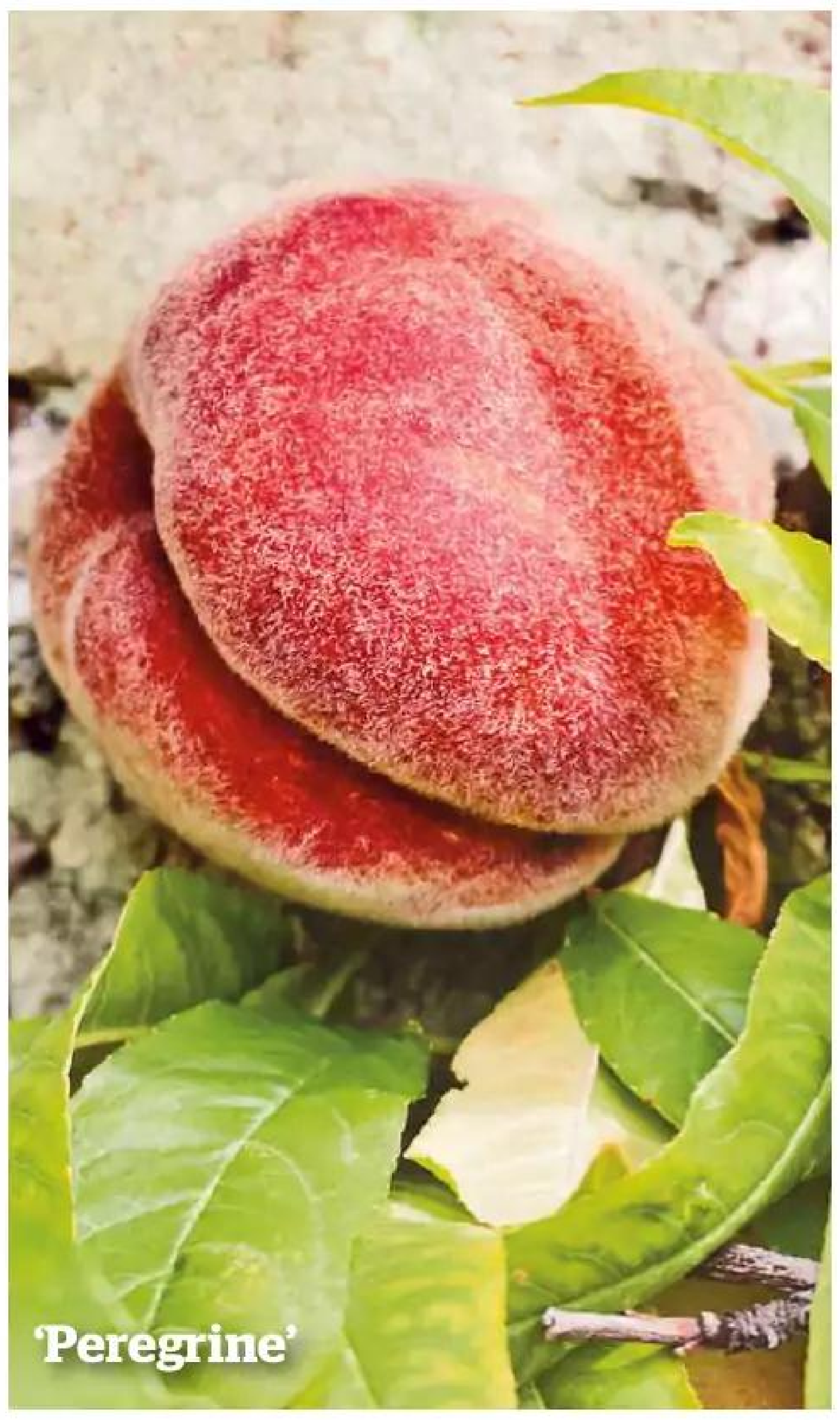
Water trees regularly, especially when the fruits are forming.

Sprinkle a general fertiliser such as pelleted poultry manure around the tree at blossom time. Follow with a mulch of garden compost or well-rotted manure.

When the fruits are cherry sized, thin out to one per cluster. When the fruits are swelling, apply a high-potash liquid fertiliser such as tomato feed once a week.

Pruning

After harvesting you need to start pruning. Peaches and nectarines flower and fruit on one-year-old shoots, so remove as much of the old growth as possible. Cut back a fruit stem to where a new shoot has grown, then tie in the new growth as a replacement.


'Peregrine'

'Avalon Pride'

TOP TIP

Pollinate the fruits by hand, pushing a paintbrush into the flowers every day while in blossom.

Harvesting

The fruits are ripe when they have coloured up and feel soft. They should come off the branch with a gentle twist.

Storage

Fruits bruise easily and don't store well. You can freeze them, but once defrosted just use them for cooking.

Troubleshooting

Control aphids and red spider mite with an insecticidal soap. Peach leaf curl is a fungus that affects the emerging leaves in spring. It causes red blistering and distortion – cover trees with polythene in late winter and early spring to stop rain splashes spreading infection.

Preparation and uses

Delicious eaten raw, of course, and added to fruit salads and pies or poached in wine with a little sugar.

5 TO TRY...

PEACHES
'AVALON PRIDE'
Pink flowers and juicy fruits from early August. Said to be resistant to leaf curl disease.

'DUKE OF YORK'
The red-skinned fruits ripen from early summer.

'PEREGRINE'
Heavy crops of fruits with red skin and white flesh in mid-August. Mildew-resistant.

DWARF 'TERRACE' FRUITS
Varieties such as Peach 'Terrace Amber' and Nectarine 'Terrace Ruby' are ideal for growing in pots.

NECTARINES
'LORD NAPIER'
Large crimson-flushed fruits with sweet, juicy white flesh, ripening in early August.

Pears

With attractive spring blossom followed by a home-grown harvest, a pear tree is as ornamental as the fruits are delicious. Grown onto rootstocks of varying sizes, pears can be grown in smaller spaces and containers and don't require too much maintenance. There is a great range of cultivars, offering more choice and flavour than in the shops.

	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
PLANT	●	●	●								●	●
HARVEST								●	●	●	●	

HEIGHT x SPREAD Fans: varies depending on type

SPACING 5.5m apart

AVG. YIELD 5.5-13.5kg per tree (fan)

Planting

- For best results, grow pear trees against a south-facing wall or fence, where they will be protected from frost.
- The soil should be free-draining and slightly acidic.
- Pear trees can be grown as standalone specimens, if space allows, or trained as espaliers or cordons which means they can be grown against walls or fences.
- Like apple trees, many varieties of pear trees rely on a pollinating partner from the same group. It's therefore best to plant two pear trees to ensure they pollinate successfully and to encourage good healthy cropping. Plant the trees when dormant in late autumn/winter.
- Dig a generous hole for your trees, adding in plenty of well-rotted farmyard manure, before planting.

Crop care

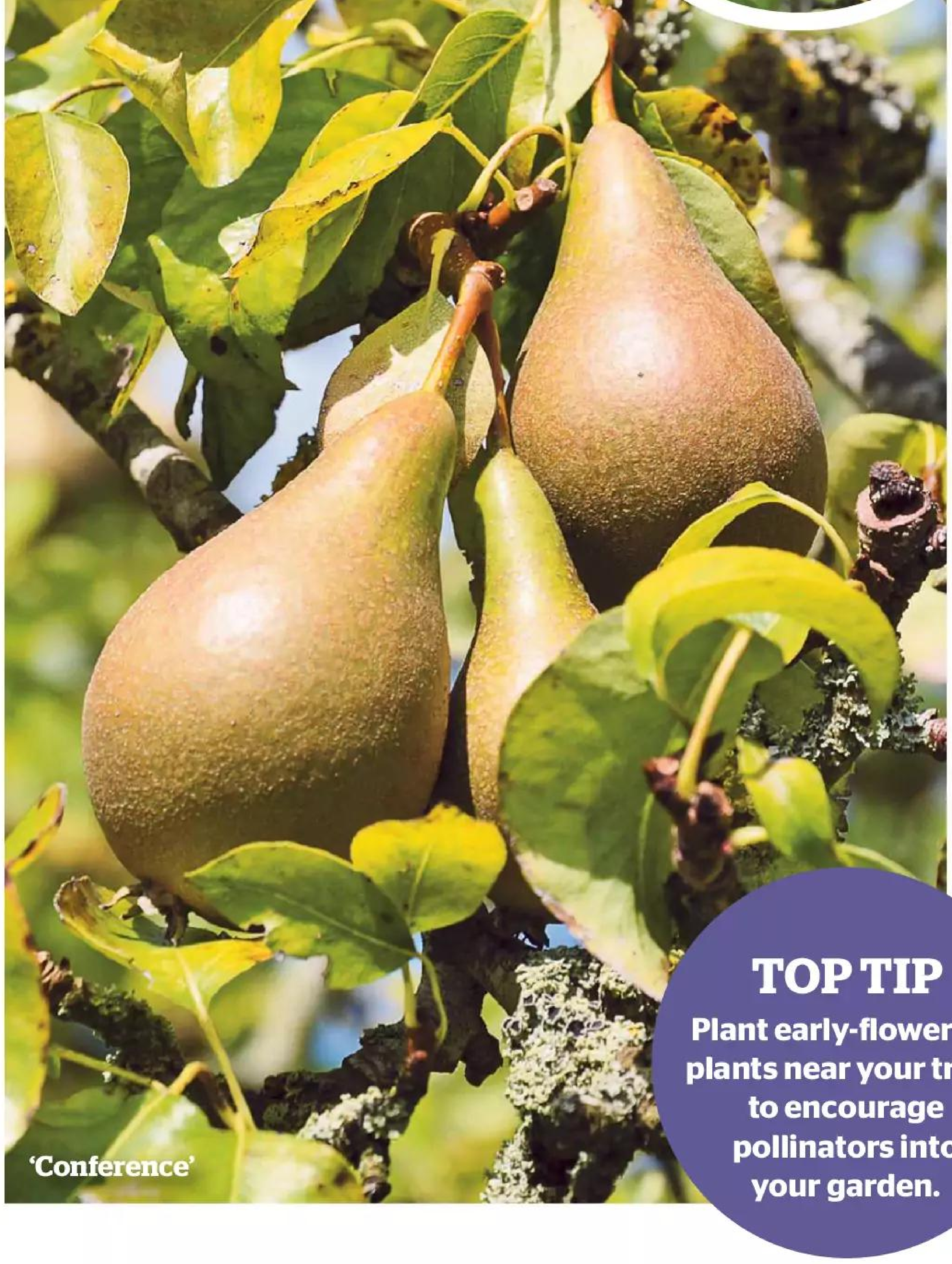
Pear blossom appears in early spring, so watch out for frosts and protect trees with fleece if the forecast predicts a cold snap. Mulch annually in spring and water in dry spells.

Pruning

Pear trees need to be pruned when dormant in mid-winter and again in summer. In winter, the aim is to remove dead, diseased and dying branches and to improve the health and productivity of the tree. In summer, pruning is important for both the shape and health of the tree. By taking out branches, you will improve air circulation and remove any unwanted growth to allow the developing fruits to ripen.

'Concorde'

'Williams 'Bon Chrétien'


'Conference'

TOP TIP

Plant early-flowering plants near your trees to encourage pollinators into your garden.

Harvesting

Pears will be ready to harvest from late August. Most are best picked when the fruit is still firm to the touch. Simply cup the individual fruits in your hand and twist off; allow to ripen in a cool, dark place. Make sure you pick them before squirrels and birds get to the fruit.

Storage

As many varieties of pear ripen better off the tree, they can often be stored successfully for several months.

Troubleshooting

Pear trees are prone to aphids, caterpillars, codling moth, pear leaf blister mite, pear rust and cherry slugworm that will skeletonise the leaves. Trees can be affected by blossom wilt, brown rot, canker, fireblight and pear scab.

See p120-123 for how to tackle these and other problems

Preparation and uses

Eat raw and cooked. They are delicious stewed with spices in red wine and used in pies and cakes.

5 TO TRY...

'BEURRE HARDY'
Excellent flavour, this variety is in Pollination Group 4 and should be grown with a pollination partner.

'CONCORDE'
Partially self-fertile but produces more fruit grown with a pollination partner. Is in Pollination Group 4.

'CONFERENCE' RHS AGM
Well-known heavy cropper, this variety is in Group 3 and should be grown with a pollination partner.

'REIMER RED'
Mid-green pears flushed with dark red, this is in Pollination Group 4 and should be grown with a pollination partner.

'WILLIAMS' BON CHRETIEN'
Heavy crops from mid to late autumn, this is in Pollination Group 3 and should be grown with a pollination partner.

Plums

Plums make good small trees for any garden, and the delicious home-grown fruits are well worth the effort. There are many different types of plum, including sweet and cooking varieties, damsons, greengages, mirabelles and sloes. They have a variety of uses, from making cakes and preserves to adding as a flavouring to gin.

Mirabelle plums

'Victoria'

	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
PLANT	●	●	●								●	●
HARVEST								●	●			

HEIGHT x SPREAD Fans: 3m x 2m

SPACING 3-4.5m apart

AVG. YIELD 6.5-11.25kg per tree (fan)

Planting

- Plums grow best in a sunny spot in free-draining, fertile soil. If you choose your tree carefully you can train it into your preferred shape – as a standard or a fan. Smaller trees, which are grown on semi-dwarfing rootstock, are easier to maintain.
- The same growing conditions apply to most trees in the plum family, although greengages grow best against a warm wall to ripen the fruit.
- Damsons are hardier, smaller trees that will often do well where larger varieties fail. They can be trained on walls and grown as 'pyramids' and are also used for windbreaks or hedging.
- Many cultivars are self-fertile so you can plant just a single tree, but plum trees will generally produce a better crop if cross-pollinated with other plums. There are four pollination groups, and a plum tree in one group can be successfully pollinated by another variety in its own group or in a group above or below it. Look out for the pollination group when choosing your trees.
- Plant in winter when trees are dormant. Bare-root plants usually establish better than container-grown trees.

Crop care

Young plum trees will need staking for the first few years.

Plums are some of the earliest fruit trees to flower and, although the trees are hardy, frost will kill the blossom. A sheltered, sunny site will protect them to some degree, but you may need to use horticultural fleece in freezing conditions.

When fruits have formed, by June or July, it's best to remove some so that they don't overload the tree.

Pruning

Don't prune plum trees in winter as this can cause them to develop silver leaf. Prune young trees in spring for shape, and established trees later on to remove dead and damaged wood. Summer pruning will keep a tree manageable and allow the fruits to ripen.

Harvesting

Allow the fruits to ripen on the tree and pick them when they are soft to the touch – the individual plums should pull away from the tree easily if they are ready.

Storage

The fruits are best eaten freshly picked, but they can be stored for 3-5 days in the fridge.

Troubleshooting

Plums are prone to aphids, birds, caterpillars, plum moth, plum sawfly and wasps. The larvae of plum moth and plum sawfly tunnel through fruits, leaving them inedible. The fruits may drop, but it's worth looking out for the telltale puncture marks in the fruit in May. If you spot them, remove these damaged plums before the larvae return to the soil. Pheromone traps can also help to protect trees. Plums are also prone to silver leaf, if pruned in winter. Brown rot and bacterial canker are also common problems – bacterial canker can be pruned out.

Preparation and uses

Eat raw or preserve in jams and chutneys. Can be stoned to use in cakes and stews.

5 TO TRY...

'CAMBRIDGE GAGE'
A very popular greengage because it is reliable and produces delicious green fruits. It is self-fertile.

'FARLEIGH DAMSON'
Also known as 'Farleigh', this is one of the best damsons, especially if pollinated with another variety.

'GOLDEN SPHERE'
A very hardy mirabelle plum with large fruits. This variety is partly self-fertile and fruits are ready in late July.

'MARJORIE'S SEEDLING'
Reliable and disease-resistant, the fruits ripen in September to October. It is self-fertile.

'VICTORIA'
Produces heavy crops of delicious fruits from August to September. The trees are compact and self-fertile.

Raspberries

Growing your own raspberries is a real joy – choose both summer- and autumn-fruiting types and you'll have rich pickings from late June into October. Grown on 'canes' (upright woody stems), they are a great investment, often fruiting for 10 years or more.

	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
PLANT	●	●	●	●						●	●	●
HARVEST						●	●	●	●	●		

HEIGHT x SPREAD Varies depending on type

SPACING 45cm apart, 1.8m between rows

AVG. YIELD 9kg per 3m row

Planting

- Mild days in late autumn or early winter are a good time to plant raspberries. Choose an open, sunny spot. The soil should be free-draining with plenty of well-rotted garden compost or manure added.
- Before planting raspberries, give the roots a good soak in water. Space the canes 45cm apart, with 1.8m between rows. Just cover the roots with about 5cm of soil. Keep any white buds at the stem base at soil level. Firm the soil around each cane and water well.
- Canes are usually pre-pruned, ready to plant. If not, cut them down to 15-20cm.
- Several canes can also be planted together in a group in a border or a large container, tying them to a central support post as a feature.

Crop care

Summer-fruiting raspberries fruit on one-year-old canes. Tie in the new canes as they develop, but prune out weak shoots. Aim for a spacing of 15cm between new canes, removing extras to avoid overcrowding. After fruiting, cut all old canes that have carried fruit down to soil level.

Autumn-fruiting raspberries produce canes that flower and fruit in the same year. Cut down all their canes in winter, allowing new canes to develop as a wide row the following year. The shorter nature of these canes means that they almost support one another. In spring, feed them with a general fertiliser and spread some mulch around the plants to keep their roots slightly moist and to suppress weeds. Keep the plants well watered during dry spells.

'Tulameen'

'Cascade Delight'

Harvesting

Take care when picking, as raspberries are very easily crushed. Ripe fruits should just tumble into your hands with the gentlest tug.

Storage

Raspberries are best picked and eaten on the same day, although you can store unwashed fruits (moisture encourages grey mould) in a single layer in the fridge for a few days. Most raspberries freeze well – spread them out on a tray to open-freeze, then store in a box or bag for up to two months.

Troubleshooting

Net the canes, otherwise you'll lose your fruit to hungry birds.

Preparation and uses

Eat them fresh, frozen or made into purées, jams and smoothies.

5 TO TRY...

EARLY SUMMER
'GLEN MOY'
Large, firm berries and spine-free stems. High-yielding; good disease resistance.

MID-SUMMER
'GLEN AMPLE'
A heavy cropper with spine-free canes. Disease-resistant.

'TULAMEEN'
Can be grown in large pots. Resistant to grey mould.

LATE SUMMER
'CASCADE DELIGHT'
Large, firm fruits. Good for difficult conditions – tolerant of heavier, wetter soils.

AUTUMN
'ALL GOLD'
Produces good yields of delicious yellow fruits.

Rhubarb

Rhubarb is a perennial plant that will pretty much take care of itself, making it a great choice for novices. With pink stems and large dark green leaves, it's a highly ornamental addition to any vegetable garden. However, only the stems are edible as the large leaves are poisonous. The stalks are high in potassium, calcium and antioxidants.

	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
PLANT OUT	●	●	●							●	●	●
HARVEST			●	●	●	●	●					

HEIGHT x SPREAD 1.4m x 1.4m

SPACING 90cm apart

AVG. YIELD 4.5-13.5kg per 3m row

Planting

- Rhubarb can be grown from seed, but it's more reliable to plant crowns. Crowns are offsets cut from divisions of vigorous parent plants – usually they are a piece of root with at least one visible dormant bud. These should be planted out in late autumn, 90cm or more apart, depending on the cultivar.
- Rhubarb will grow in a sunny, open site on a wide range of soils, as long as the soil has been well prepared with plenty of manure or compost.
- If you like a challenge, sow rhubarb seed outdoors in spring in a seed bed, thinning to 15cm apart and then once more to 30cm apart. The quality of seed-grown rhubarb can vary, however, so be ruthless in selecting the strongest plants to grow on. Plant out your chosen plants in a permanent site in autumn or spring.

Crop care

Rhubarb does not need much attention and, once established, plants will be productive for around 10 years. Maintaining soil fertility is the key to keeping plants healthy. Keep rhubarb well mulched through the growing season to retain moisture. Give dormant plants a hearty blanket of manure in winter, followed by a liquid feed in spring.

To get the sweetest and earliest crop of rhubarb you need to force plants to produce stems before they would normally be ready. This simply means covering the crowns in early winter to block out the light. You can use a bin, bucket or a traditional terracotta rhubarb forcer. Around five weeks later, your plants will have tender stems ready to harvest. However, it is best to wait until your plants are well established before forcing them.

Harvesting

With newly planted crowns, don't harvest in the first year and take only a few stalks in the second. If you have established plants, three years or more old, rhubarb is ready to harvest from spring onwards, as soon as the stalks are long enough – between 30-60cm, depending on the variety. Don't wait for them to turn red. There's no need to use a knife, simply pull and twist the stems off the plant, as this stimulates fresh new growth.

Forced rhubarb is usually ready in late winter and early spring. The stems will be shorter but sweeter.

'Timperley Early'

'Fulton's Strawberry Surprise'

Storage

Rhubarb is at its most delicious when cooked after being freshly picked. However, it can be frozen raw or cooked.

Troubleshooting

Rhubarb can be prone to honey fungus, crown rot and viruses that will weaken the plants, so it is best to dig up affected plants and start again on a new site. Crown rot causes the crowns to turn brown and soft. Sadly, there's no remedy.

Preparation and uses

Turn rhubarb into delicious jams or use in pies and crumbles.

5 TO TRY...

'CAWOOD DELIGHT'
A relatively new variety with dark pinky-red stems and a good shine and flavour. Produces smaller yields and is not suitable for forcing.

'FULTON'S STRAWBERRY SURPRISE' RHS AGM
Has vivid red stems on strong, vigorous plants. Ideal for growing in borders or large patio containers.

'TIMPERLEY EARLY'
Perfect for forcing, this will bear tender pink stems in February. But even unforced, it is one of the earliest varieties, ready from March.

'STOCKBRIDGE ARROW'
Long, thick stems with a good colour and sweet flavour. The leaves are arrow-shaped and very ornamental.

'VICTORIA'
High yields of long stems with a sweet flavour and good texture. Can be harvested as baby stems, forced or simply left to mature.

Strawberries

Always a favourite, strawberries give a quick return for your efforts. Choose several varieties that crop in succession and you'll have sun-warmed, juicy berries to pick from late May to September.

	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
PLANT			●	●	●		●	●	●	●		
HARVEST					●	●	●	●	●			

HEIGHT x SPREAD 30cm x 45cm

SPACING Crown level with soil, space 30-45cm apart, 60cm between rows

AVG. YIELD 450g per plant

Planting

- Plant bare-root strawberry runners during spring or late summer/autumn. A sunny, sheltered site is essential.
- Nurseries sell bare-root runners that have been stored in cold conditions. Once planted, these young plants grow quickly to form flowers and fruit in as little as 60 days.
- To prepare the soil, dig in plenty of well-rotted garden compost and apply a dressing of sulphate of potash fertiliser. Space the plants 30-45cm apart, with their roots just buried, then firm the soil around them. Water well for the first few weeks.
- Strawberries are suitable for growing in pots and hanging baskets. Use deep pots at least 15cm wide and plant one strawberry per pot in soil-based compost.
- A growing bag will support six to eight strawberry plants, especially if you lay one bag on top of another, with holes cut to allow the roots to penetrate to the full depth.

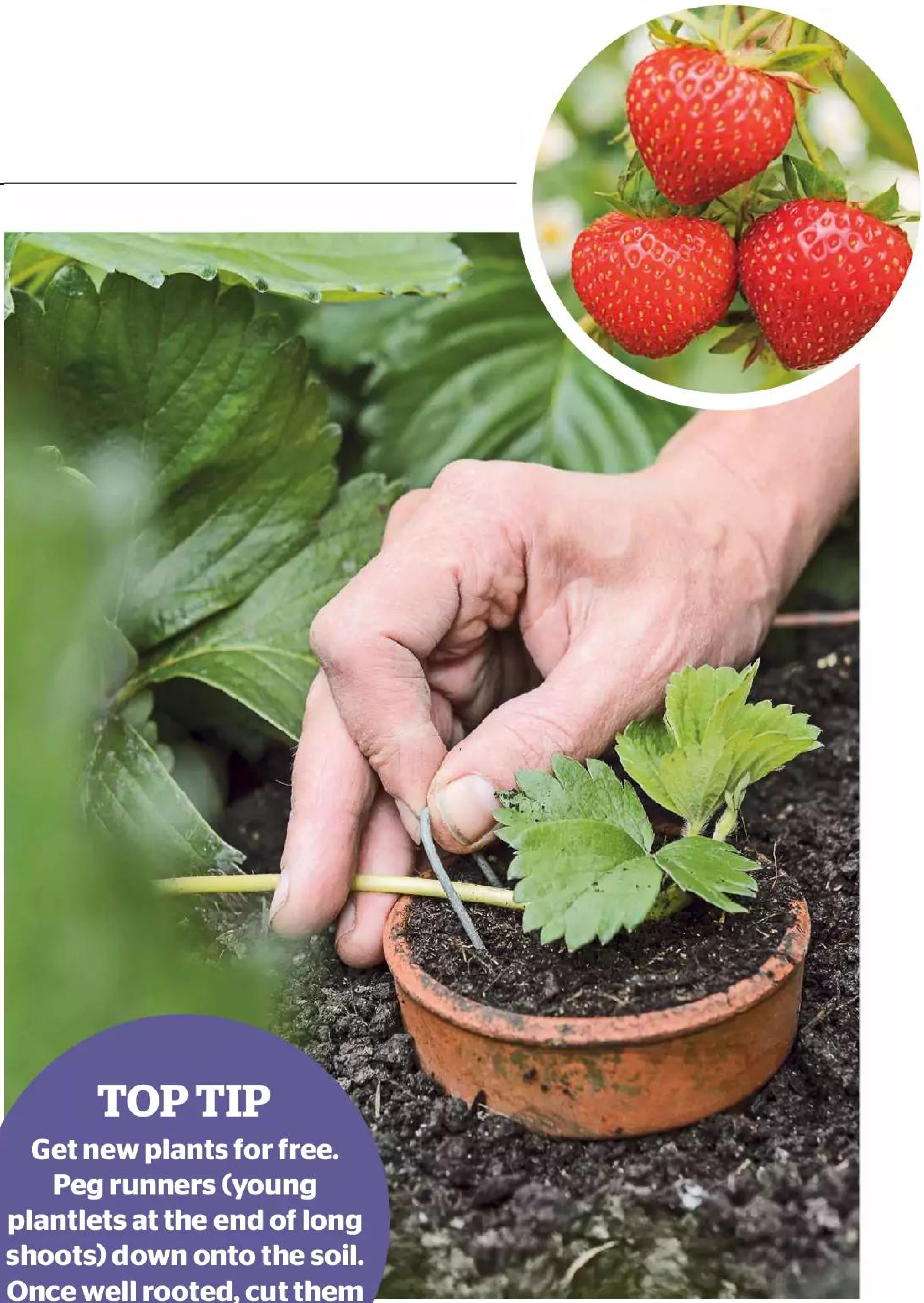
Crop care

Feed with tomato fertiliser (follow the pack instructions) to encourage flowering and fruiting, and water regularly. Avoid wetting any of the ripening fruits to prevent grey mould. Tuck some straw around the plants just before the fruit starts to develop – this helps to keep the berries clean and deters slugs and snails.

To encourage strong growth for next year's crop, cut off the foliage about 5cm above ground level after fruiting, and give plants a good feed with a general-purpose fertiliser (follow the instructions on the pack). After three to four years, the fruit size and quality decline, so you will need to replace your plants with new stock.

Harvesting

Once strawberries have been picked, the ripening process stops. So wait until the berries are fully red, then pinch through the stalks with your finger and thumb to avoid bruising the fruit.



TOP TIP

Get new plants for free. Peg runners (young plantlets at the end of long shoots) down onto the soil. Once well rooted, cut them from the parent and transplant them.

Storage

As strawberries are perishable, they're best eaten straight from the plant, still warm from the sun. You can store fruit, unwashed, for a few days in the fridge. Some varieties are suitable for freezing.

Troubleshooting

Protect against slugs and snails, and net plants to deter birds. Grey mould can be a problem in wet weather, causing the berries to rot. Water plants in the morning rather than in the evening to give them time to dry out. If the problem persists, use a systemic fungicide.

Preparation and uses

Damp strawberries will quickly go mouldy, so only wash what you can eat and blot them dry with kitchen paper. If you're lucky enough to have a glut of them, whizz them into delicious smoothies or use to make jam.

5 TO TRY...

Summer-fruiting varieties crop from late May to late July, while everbearers crop in June with a second flush in late summer.

SUMMER FRUITERS

'HAPIL'
Large, glossy fruits, even in dry conditions.

'HONEOYE'
A prolific fruiter, producing large, firm berries.

'PEGASUS'
Vigorous grower with sweet, juicy, top-quality berries.

EVERBEARERS

'AROMEL'
Juicy dark red berries that crop over a long period.

'FLAMENCO'
Very sweet fruits from July until early September

Strawberries are not only delicious, they are also rich in vitamin C

Grow your own Herbs

Herbs are easy to grow and will transform your garden and cooking. Have a look through our guide to discover which ones are best for your plot

Herbs are the most generous of plants. Not only do they attract bees and butterflies to the garden, they can transform a simple meal into a feast and have health benefits, too. There are so many herbs available for gardeners, but if you're short on time and still want fresh pickings for your kitchen, perennial ones – those that live for several years – are ideal as they need little care and can be grown in a pot by the back door.

The herbs that will save you money are annuals – sown fresh each spring – such as basil, coriander and dill. These are easy to grow, quick to establish and produce large crops. If you sow them every three to four weeks, you could be picking handfuls of flavour-packed herbs from June right through to autumn.

To work out how best to care for your herbs, think about where they came from originally, or where they grow in the wild, as this gives an indication of the soil and aspect they prefer. Giving herbs the right conditions helps to ensure they produce the best flavour.

Plant in full sun, if possible, which will bring the essential oils to the surface of the leaves, giving a strong flavour. Mint, rosemary and chives will tolerate some shade, but if grown in damp, cold soil they may suffer over the winter.

Bay

This evergreen shrub is grown for its aromatic leaves, which are used to flavour dishes. It's also become a popular plant for formal container displays and is often sold trained as a standard or shaped as an alternative to yew or box topiary. The plants are most often positioned either side of a front door as a formal and year-round welcome to guests. The aromatic leaves are shiny, and in spring the plants bear very insignificant yellow flowers.

	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
PLANT			●	●	●	●	●					
HARVEST	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●

HEIGHT x SPREAD Up to 8m x 10m

AVG. YIELD Pick leaves as required

Bay is grown only for its foliage

Planting

- Bay enjoys full sun or partial shade. It is not completely hardy – in exposed gardens it can only cope with temperatures down to about -5°C and can suffer from leaf damage. This is easily solved by covering plants with horticultural fleece in winter or moving them to a sheltered spot.
- Bay is more likely to make it through the winter unscathed if planted in a sheltered spot. It tends to be hardier when planted directly into the garden, as plants can put down a more comprehensive root system. If planted in the garden and left to grow unclipped, expect plants to reach up to 8m. Bay will grow on any soil as long as it is free-draining.
- Bay is a dioecious plant, which means it has male and female flowers on separate plants. Male and female plants are not identified in garden centres, as most gardeners only grow them for their foliage – the flowers are insignificant and the berries inedible.

- Improve garden soil before planting by digging in well-rotted organic matter. If planting as a formal statement in the garden, ensure the plant is straight and firm it in. Plant at the same depth as it was in the pot when you bought it. Water in well.
- If growing in a container, plant in a soil-based tree and shrub compost. Bay trees don't mind being slightly root-bound, but plants should be repotted every three years. Don't allow containers to dry out in summer, but reduce watering in winter.

Crop care

Bay should be pruned in summer with secateurs. Old plants can be rejuvenated by cutting them back hard in late spring. You would be wise to do this over two years, as they are slow to bounce back.

Cut half the stems back in year one and the rest in year two. When pruning or clipping bay, avoid using hedge shears as half-cut leaves will look unsightly – secateurs are preferable.

If growing bay in a container, ensure there is good drainage. Bay sitting in wet soil is likely to die over winter.

Harvesting

The leaves can be picked all year round as and when you need them.

Storage

Use fresh, or dry for later use. Hang a branch in a well-ventilated spot and leave to dry for a few weeks.

Troubleshooting

Bay is fairly trouble-free. If the leaves get damaged by frost or wind pick them off, or trim plants in late spring or summer to encourage new growth.

Preparation and uses

Bay leaves are the main ingredient in a bouquet garni and can be used either dried or fresh.

2 TO TRY...

LAURUS NOBILIS

This variety has aromatic dark green leaves. Once mature, plants can reach up to 8m, but bear in mind that this will take many years.

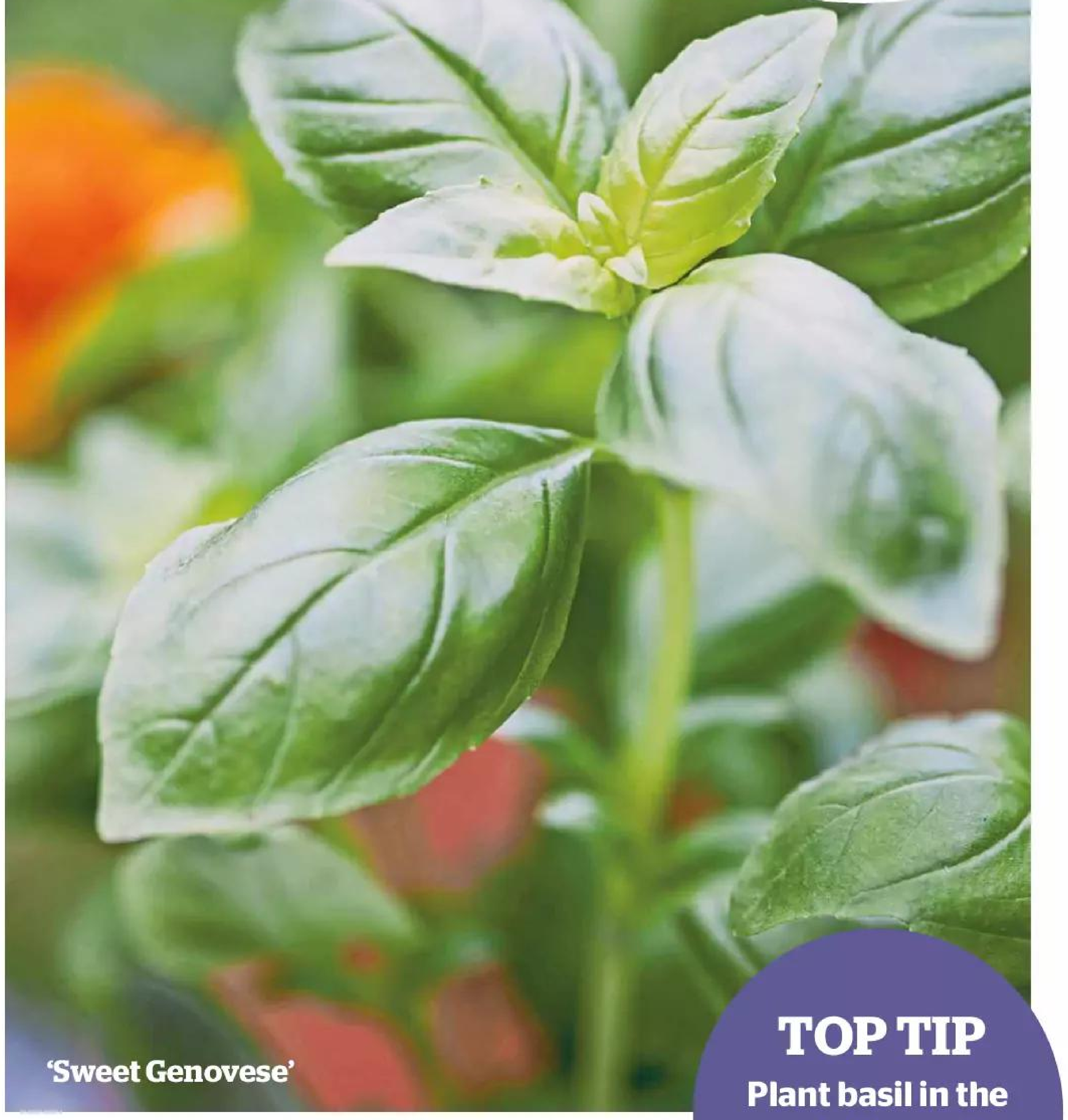
***LAURUS NOBILIS* 'AUREA'**

Lime-green and yellow foliage, with insignificant flowers in spring. This variety is slightly smaller than *Laurus nobilis* when it is mature.

Basil

Used in pasta sauces, pizzas, salads and Thai curries, aromatic basil is an essential ingredient to have in the kitchen. Sweet basil tends to dominate supermarket shelves, but there are lots of other exciting types to try when you grow your own.

'Crimson King'


'Sweet Genovese'

	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
SOW		●	●	●								
PLANT OUT						●	●					
HARVEST						●	●	●	●			

HEIGHT x SPREAD 30-45cm x 30-45cm

SPACING 0.5cm deep, 30cm apart, 30cm between rows

AVG. YIELD Pick leaves as required

Planting

- Basil thrives in free-draining, fertile soil in a warm, sheltered position out of direct midday sun.
- To get a quality crop that lasts from early spring to mid-autumn, it's best to grow it in containers.
- Start your seeds off in pots of moist multi-purpose compost on a warm but not sunny windowsill.
- When the seedlings are big enough to handle, pot them on into individual pots filled with a soil-based compost.
- Put them outside in early summer, after the last frost. To acclimatise them to the outdoors, stand them outside in a sheltered, lightly shaded spot during the day, and bring them back in at night. Do this daily for about two weeks.

Crop care

Outdoors, basil needs protection from wind and frost. Always water with care, ideally before midday, and avoid splashing the leaves. This should help to prevent botrytis (grey mould). Plants will grow quickly in containers, so expect to pot them up a few times during the growing season. Basil is a half-hardy annual, so new plants will be needed each year. However, in autumn, when temperatures start to dip, bring a few plants back indoors to provide a fresh supply of leaves during winter.

Harvesting

Pick the leaves and tops of basil regularly throughout the summer to use them fresh. You can be quite ruthless – just leave at least three pairs of side shoots so your plants can regrow. Don't wash the leaves until you're ready to use them as they'll turn slimy.

Storage

Store the leaves in the fridge for up to three days. Or stand cut stems in a glass of water ready to use. To freeze basil, chop the leaves and place in an ice-cube tray, cover with water and store in the freezer. Use within five months.

Troubleshooting

Protect your plants from snails and slugs. Basil is also prone to infestations of whitefly and red spider mite, both of which can be deterred by spraying the plants with horticultural soap.

Preparation and uses

To enjoy the best flavour from basil, add fresh leaves at the end of cooking. It is said that you should tear rather than chop basil leaves to release their wonderful aroma. Use in salads, soups and stews, and to make pesto and other Italian-style sauces, particularly any recipe containing tomatoes.

TOP TIP

Plant basil in the vegetable garden to repel whitefly and aphids.

5 TO TRY...

'CINNAMON'
Olive-green and brown leaves with a spicy flavour.

'CRIMSON KING'
Purple-leaved with uniform leaves, this has greater vigour than other purple varieties.

'GREEK'
Small leaves with a strong anise-clove flavour. Good choice for containers.

'RED RUBIN'
Produces highly aromatic deep purple leaves.

'SWEET GENOVESE'
Large-leaved variety with a sweet flavour.

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Chives

Chives are a great addition to a herb collection. With grass-like, mild, onion-flavoured leaves and miniature purple allium flowers, it's very pretty and loved by bees. The chopped leaves and flowers make lovely summer garnishes for salads and soups. Chives are easy to grow, even if you only have a windowsill, and thrive both in containers and in ground.

	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
SOW			●	●	●							
PLANT OUT				●	●							
HARVEST							●	●	●			

HEIGHT x SPREAD 30-45cm x 30-45cm

SPACING 1cm deep, 30cm apart, 25cm between rows

AVG. YIELD Pick leaves as required

Planting

- Sow chive seeds into a small pot or module and place in a heated propagator or on a warm windowsill. Chive seeds need between 20-25ºC to germinate. Within three weeks, seedlings should start to appear.
- There is no need to thin out unless your pot is very crowded.
- When the seedlings are about 5cm high, they can be moved from the propagator and transplanted into 15-20cm pots filled with soil-based or multi-purpose compost.
- Grow these young plants on in cooler conditions, taking care to harden them off for about a week before finally planting them outside.

Crop care

Chives prefer fertile, free-draining soil and are happy growing in sun or partial shade. Keep the plants well watered, particularly during hot weather. Pot-grown chives will need dividing and repotting when they have filled their container.

Chives are perennial plants, so they will die back during the winter months. They can become congested after a few years, but lifting and dividing a clump in spring will rejuvenate the plant. You can plant out the divisions to make new chive plants.

Chive flowers make colourful garnishes for many dishes

TOP TIP

Chives are a good companion plant for carrots, as the smell can deter pests such as carrot root fly.

Harvesting

Snip with scissors as needed, cutting from the base of the plant to encourage more growth. Use the blooms as a decorative garnish but not the stems as they're not edible.

Storage

Chives are best used freshly picked. They can be frozen, but will lose some flavour and texture.

Troubleshooting

Chives can be prone to greenfly – simply remove them with your fingers or use a biological control. Leek rust is a fungal disease that can cause yellow spots on chive leaves. There is no cure, so dispose of plants – do not add to the compost heap. Wet weather can contribute to the spread of this rust and make leaves shrivel. Don't grow leeks, garlic or onions in the same spot.

Preparation and uses

Use as a garnish for salads and soups, or in fish and cheese dishes.

3 TO TRY...

Most seed packets will be simply named 'Chives', but here are a few varieties to look out for if you want to try something different.

'BLACK ISLE BLUSH'
Pale mauve flowers with a deep pink centre. Fast grower, with a subtle tang.

'FINE LEAVED'
This has a milder flavour and thinner leaves than common varieties of chives.

'FORESCATE'
Pale pink flowers and big clumps of leaves that have a garlic flavour.

Coriander

This fragrant herb is a staple ingredient in Asian and Middle Eastern dishes – leaves, stalks, seeds and all. It also adds a fresh, summery taste to salads. An easy-to-grow leafy herb, you can sow coriander seeds directly into the soil or in pots – and your kitchen will be supplied with fresh pickings all through summer.

	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
SOW						●	●	●	●			
PLANT OUT						●	●					
HARVEST							●	●	●	●	●	●

HEIGHT x SPREAD 50-60cm x 20-25cm

SPACING 1cm deep, 25cm apart, 30cm between rows

AVG. YIELD Pick leaves as required

Planting

- Coriander prefers well-drained soil and full sun, but it will tolerate some shade at the height of summer. The seeds can be slow to germinate, but crushing them very gently before sowing can help the process along.
- Coriander has a long tap root, which shouldn't be disturbed, so avoid transplanting.
- Sow the seeds directly into the soil outdoors where they are to grow, or into pots.
- In the vegetable plot, sow seeds thinly 1cm deep in rows that are 30cm apart. The seeds should germinate within 7-20 days.
- Thin out the seedlings to 25cm apart. Sow regularly through the summer for a constant supply. Seeds can be sown until late in the season for winter use.

Crop care

Keep plants weed-free and watered, but do not overwater – the soil should be just damp. Dry soil can cause plants to bolt or flower prematurely. If the plant looks tired you can feed with a liquid seaweed mix.

If growing outdoors for winter use, make sure you protect plants with a cloche and that they have as much light as possible to produce plenty of leafy growth.

Harvesting

Pick fresh coriander leaves as needed through the growing season and this will encourage more leaves to grow. These can be snipped at the base of the stem, which is also full of flavour.

If you want to harvest the seeds, allow a few plants to flower. After flowering, when the seeds have appeared and the plant is beginning to die off, pull it up and place the seed heads in a large paper bag. Hang this upside-down to dry out thoroughly. After a few weeks you can shake the seeds into the bag.

Both the leaves and stems are edible

Storage

Store coriander seeds in an airtight container – they can be used whole or crushed to a powder. At the end of the season, you can finely chop coriander before freezing it. Frozen coriander will keep its flavour for use in curries, soups and stews, but will not really work as a garnish.

Troubleshooting

Coriander is relatively trouble-free. Young seedlings may be tempting to slugs and snails, so protect them (see Top Tip). Some varieties are prone to bolting, so ensure you have a few extra plants to rely on for fresh leaves and stems, or sow regularly through the season. Collect seed from plants that have bolted.

Preparation and uses

It's hard to think of a Thai curry without coriander, and many Indian curries use both the fresh leaves and the dried seeds in recipes.

TOP TIP

Protect seedlings from snails and slugs with crushed eggshells or sharp grit.

5 TO TRY...

'CALYPSO' RHS AGM
Slow to bolt variety that can be cut right back to regrow at least three times in summer.

'CHECHNYA'
Aromatic eastern European variety that is quick-growing.

'CONFETTI'
Feathery leaves with a slightly sweeter flavour. Works well in containers.

'LEISURE'
Produces masses of spicy leaves and is slow to bolt.

'LEMON'
Compact variety with subtle, citrus-flavoured leaves.

Dill

Dill is mostly used in fish dishes, though it was once a remedy for headaches and coughs. As well as its culinary uses, it is a beautiful ornamental plant with feathery leaves, similar to fennel, and yellow flowers. Dill is also a magnet for wildlife, and the flowers attract hoverflies, bees and butterflies.

	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
SOW				●	●	●	●					
PLANT OUT					●	●	●					
HARVEST						●	●	●	●			

HEIGHT x SPREAD 90cm x 30cm

SPACING 1cm deep, 25cm apart, 25cm between rows

AVG. YIELD Pick leaves as required

Planting

- Sow dill seeds outdoors directly into well-prepared soil in a sheltered, sunny position. Sow the seeds thinly 1cm deep in rows 25cm apart.
- Dill can also be sown directly into large pots. Make regular sowings for a continuous supply of fresh leaves through the summer.
- If you want to get a head start, you can sow seeds under cover a little earlier in the season using plug trays. Plant out the plugs after all risk of frost has passed.
- Dill tends to bolt if its roots have been disturbed while planting.

Crop care

When the seedlings are large enough to handle, thin out to 25cm apart.

Plants should be well watered, particularly during hot, dry weather, and keep weed-free to stop any competition for water and nutrients.

Plants may need additional support from canes, as strong winds can flatten them.

Dill does not normally need feeding, but an occasional liquid feed of a balanced fertiliser will give the plants a boost.

Harvesting

Dill leaves can be cut regularly, as needed, through the summer – snip them off with scissors. At the end of summer, the seeds can be harvested from any plants that have flowered. Cut the plants down, cover the seed heads in a paper bag and hang upside-down to dry. Shake until the seeds fall off into the bag.

Grow this fragile plant in a sheltered spot

Storage

The leaves are best used fresh but they can be frozen. Dill seeds should be stored in an airtight container.

Troubleshooting

Slugs and snails can be a problem, so protect young plants with crushed eggshells or sharp grit. Dill can also be plagued by greenfly – these sap-sucking aphids will coat the plants with their sticky honeydew. The best treatment is to squash them with your fingers.

Dill is prone to bolting and flowering prematurely – see tip.

Preparation and uses

Finely chop the leaves and use in fish dishes, especially Scandinavian recipes such as gravlax. Dill also goes well in plain yogurt or soured cream dips.

TOP TIP

Keep plants well watered and avoid root disturbance to help prevent bolting.

5 TO TRY...

'BOUQUET'
A dwarf form with compact, ferny foliage. It is very low-maintenance and a good choice for growing in pots.

'DUKAT'
This is a vigorous variety and is favoured for its abundant foliage. It is slow to bolt and easy to grow.

'HERKULES'
A tall variety that grows up to 1.2m high, so you can expect plenty of tasty, fragrant leaves.

'MAMMOTH'
This is recommended for its abundant seed production and grows to 90cm high.

'THALIA'
A slow to bolt variety that produces a high yield of fragrant leaves.

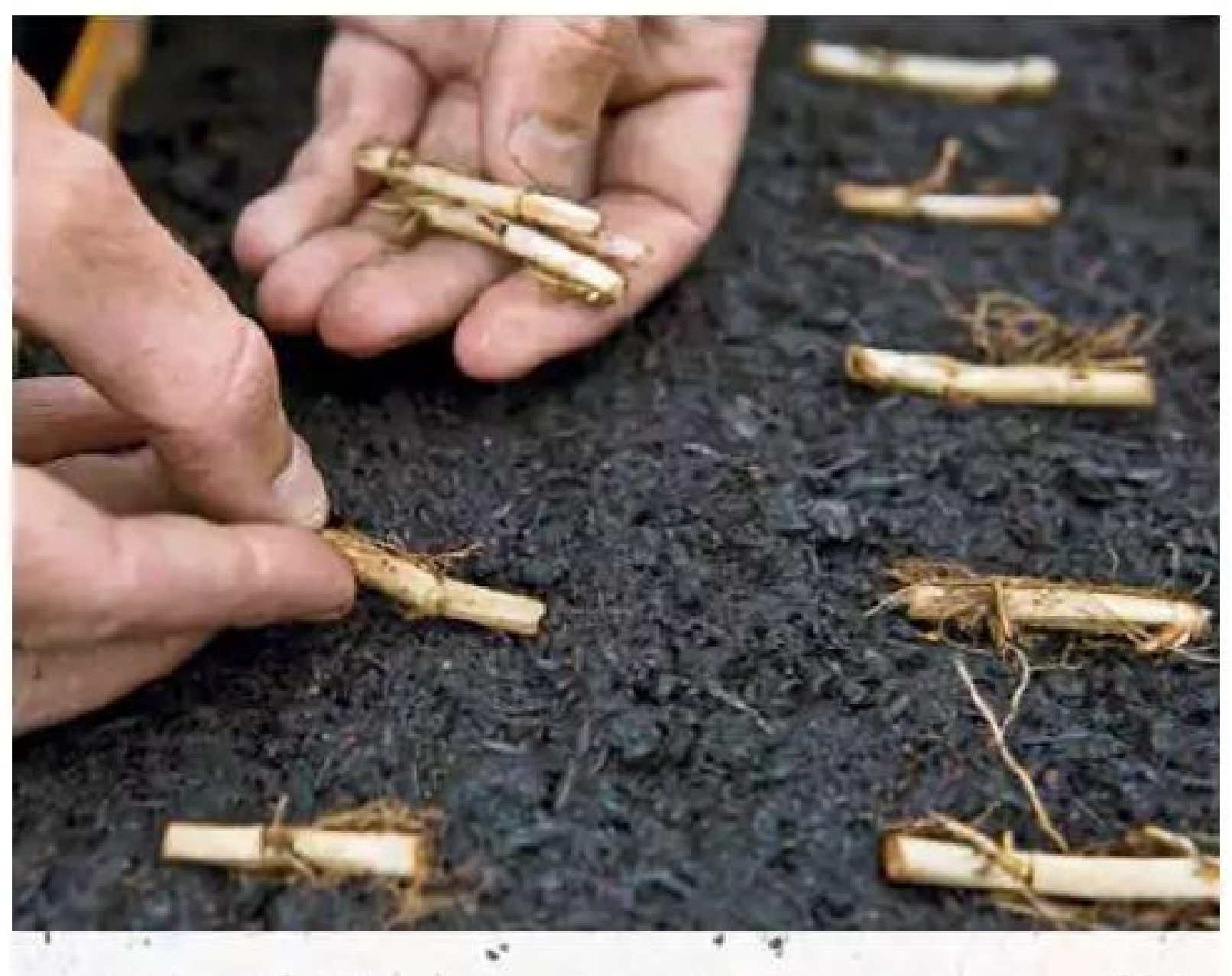
Mint

From a refreshing tea to a classic sauce for roast lamb and new potatoes, mint is one of the most useful culinary herbs. The flowers are also good for attracting beneficial insects into the garden, such as hoverflies, lacewings and butterflies.

	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
PLANT OUT			●	●	●							
HARVEST					●	●	●	●	●	●		

HEIGHT x SPREAD Groundcover to 1m high; spread indefinite

AVG. YIELD Pick leaves as required



Planting

- Mint is a hardy perennial herb that's easy to grow from young plants planted out in spring or autumn. It's also easy to propagate from root cuttings (see Top Tip).
- Mint likes free-draining, fertile soil in light shade, where its roots will stay moist but never become waterlogged.
- Most mints are invasive, so you may want to restrict their roots by planting in a bottomless bucket sunk into the ground. Or grow in a container in free-draining, soil-based compost.
- Keep a couple of pots by the kitchen door – one to pick while the other grows.

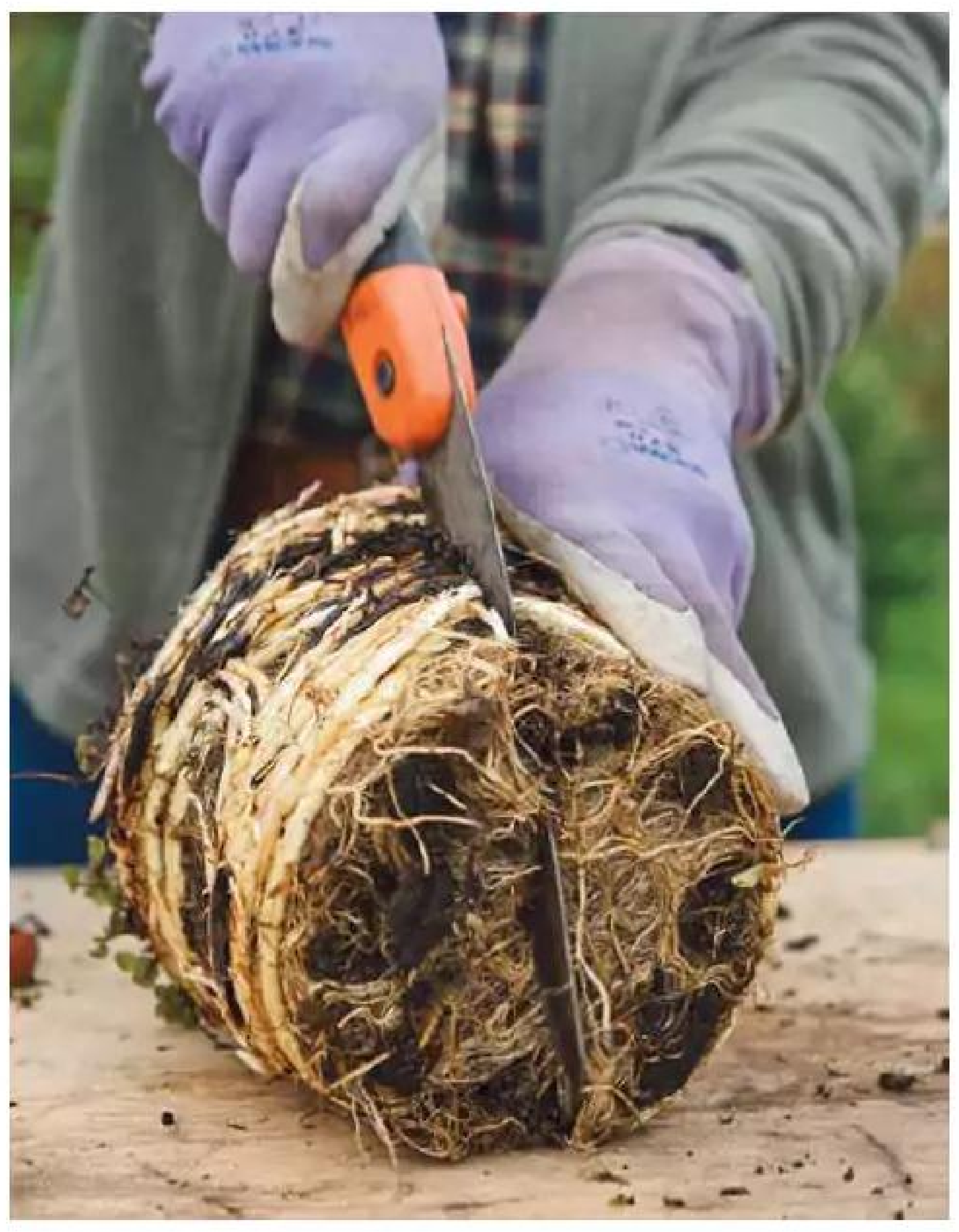
Crop care

For the best flavour, keep cutting mint to stimulate new leafy growth.

After flowering in late summer, cut back plants to just above soil level and feed with a high-nitrogen fertiliser to encourage a fresh flush of leaves for autumn picking.

In autumn, divide mint to make new plants. Lift a clump and chop it into pieces using a spade. Discard the old centre and replant the vigorous outer sections. You can also divide congested pot-grown mint in autumn.

Sit containers on pot feet to avoid waterlogging over winter.



Harvesting

Mint, like most herbs, is best used fresh when the oils are at their most intense in flavour. You can start harvesting as soon as greenery appears above the ground in spring and continue through to the first frosts. Nipping out the tips of the stems encourages the plant to create a bushy habit.

'Tashkent'

Mint is extremely versatile in the kitchen

TOP TIP

Take root cuttings from a mature plant and press down into damp compost. Cover with compost and leave to sprout.

Storage

Freezing mint is the next best thing to using it fresh. Wash and shake the leaves dry, then finely chop. Fill an ice-cube tray with the chopped mint and pop in the freezer (there's no need to add water). When frozen, pop the cubes into bags and seal.

Troubleshooting

Check plants regularly for mint rust – look for swollen stems with orange spots on the leaves. Dig up infected plants and bin them. Mint rust remains in the soil for at least three years, so don't plant other mints, tarragon or chives in that spot after infection.

Preparation and uses

Add fresh mint to buttered peas and new potatoes or combine with sugar and white wine vinegar for a classic sauce to accompany roast lamb. Steep a handful of leaves in boiling water, with added sugar to taste, for a soothing mint tea.

5 TO TRY...

'BANANA'
Low-growing with a peppermint taste and a hint of banana – hence the name!

'BOWLES'S MINT'
Fast grower, bearing mauve flowers and large leaves. Best for making mint sauce.

'CHOCOLATE'
A non-invasive variety, this produces brown leaves that taste like after-dinner mints.

'LIME'
Non-invasive with lime-flavoured dark green/purple leaves. Great in fruit salads.

'TASHKENT'
A robust plant with a strong spearminty flavour, crinkled leaves and purple flowers.

Oregano

From pizza to pasta sauces, Greek salads and Spanish stews, the classic flavour of oregano is an essential ingredient in many Mediterranean dishes. Also known as marjoram, oregano is one of the key plants in herb gardens. It has medicinal as well as culinary uses – in teas to soothe digestive problems and as an antiseptic. With its compact leaves and pretty flowers, oregano also makes a good creeping ground cover plant or an attractive filler for window boxes or containers.

	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
SOW		●	●	●	●							
PLANT OUT				●	●	●	●					
HARVEST					●	●	●	●	●	●		

HEIGHT x SPREAD 45cm x 45cm

SPACING 1cm deep, 30cm apart, 30cm between rows

AVG. YIELD Pick leaves as required

Planting

- Oregano can be grown from seed, but it is much easier to take a division or rooted cutting from an existing plant.
- To grow from a division, dig up an existing clump or buy a pot of ready-grown oregano. Pull the plant gently apart into several smaller clumps, trimming the roots to create a tidy base, and pot up into individual pots filled with well-drained compost.
- To grow from seed, fill small pots with seed compost and thinly sow a few seeds. The seeds need heat to germinate, so place pots in a heated propagator or on a warm windowsill. When the seedlings have a few leaves, pot them on into larger pots filled with free-draining garden compost.
- As it is a plant of Mediterranean origin, oregano needs plenty of full sun with good drainage. It does not appreciate having wet roots, so make sure you include a handful of grit when planting out.

Crop care

Cut leaves right back to the base of the plant in late winter/early spring to encourage plenty of fresh new growth with good, flavoursome leaves. If you have well-established pots of oregano, the plants will benefit from repotting in spring, with fresh compost and some slow-release fertiliser.

Cut the leaves back once more mid-season for another burst of fresh growth. However, if you want to enjoy the flowers – and allow the insects to enjoy them too – wait until after flowering to cut leaves back at the end of the season.

Harvesting

Oregano leaves can be picked through the year as you need them. You can pick leaves fresh from the plants through the winter if you keep them in a sheltered spot.

Storage

The leaves are most commonly used dried but they can also be frozen. Take some leaves and freeze in an ice-cube tray for adding to soups and stews.

Troubleshooting

Oregano is relatively trouble-free to grow, providing the plants have the right growing conditions.

Dwarf oregano

'Aureum Crispum'

TOP TIP

Oregano is good for attracting bees and butterflies. It also makes a good companion plant, helping to deter aphids.

Preparation and uses

Sprinkle dried oregano on top of pizzas and add to tomato sauces and salads. The dried leaves have a stronger flavour than fresh leaves.

5 TO TRY…

'AUREUM CRISPUM'
A very aromatic variety with wavy golden leaves and pretty pink flowers.

GREEK OREGANO
This is a good, strong-tasting variety for drying, with bright green leaves and white flowers.

ORIGANUM VULGARE
The sweet-scented wild species herb, bearing dark green leaves and pink flowers.

'KENT BEAUTY'
Ornamental dwarf cultivar with grey-green foliage and large, drooping pink flowers. Not usually used in cooking.

'ROSENKUPPEL'
Compact, purely ornamental variety with purple-flushed foliage and tubular purple flowers. It is not edible.

Parsley

According to an old English folk tale, parsley grows best in a household where the wife wears the trousers! Whether you choose to grow it for mythical or feminist reasons, or for its culinary properties, it is a great addition to a herb garden. Parsley is a rich source of vitamin C and iron and is easy to grow, even in part shade.

	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
SOW			●	●	●	●						
PLANT OUT					●	●	●					
HARVEST						●	●	●	●	●		

HEIGHT x SPREAD 45cm x 45cm

SPACING 1cm deep, 15cm apart, 30cm between rows

AVG. YIELD Pick leaves as required

'Titan'

TOP TIP

Split a pot of supermarket herbs and pot up the sections to save time on sowing, then plant outdoors in pots.

Planting

- Sow seeds directly into well-prepared soil 1cm deep with 30cm between rows. Lightly cover the seeds and water them in well. When the seedlings are large enough, thin them to 15cm apart.
- Alternatively, if you have less space available, fill a pot with seed compost and sow seeds thinly, covering with a light layer of compost and watering in. Make sure the compost does not dry out.
- The seeds can take six weeks to germinate and seedlings should be thinned out and potted on when big enough.
- When moving them to a larger pot, use a moisture-retentive, soil-based compost to prevent young plants from drying out.
- Sow batches of seeds a few weeks apart so you have a continuous supply of parsley.

Crop care

Parsley needs plenty of water, particularly during dry weather, and benefits from an occasional liquid seaweed feed to boost leafy growth. Cut back any yellowing foliage.

A biennial plant, the flowers will be produced in the second year if plants are not regularly cut back. If you want to save seed, allow some plants to flower.

Harvesting

Parsley is best picked as needed, cutting the stems at the base so new leaves grow back quickly. You may want to grow several plants so you can harvest from one, while another is left to produce new growth.

Storage

The leaves can be dried and stored, but the flavour is less intense. It is better to chop it finely in a food processor and freeze it if you want to store for later use. As parsley plants are so easy to grow it makes most sense to maintain a fresh supply.

Troubleshooting

Parsley is in the carrot family and therefore prone to some of the pests that affect carrots, such as carrot fly. So, take similar precautions such as companion planting with garlic or onions. Also protect the young seedlings from slugs and snails.

Preparation and uses

Parsley can be added to a wide range of recipes, from soups and stews to omelettes and Middle Eastern salads like tabbouleh.

5 TO TRY...

'APHRODITE'
This has good-flavoured dark green leaves with a tight curl, often used as a garnish.

FRENCH
With its flat deep green leaves, this variety has a stronger flavour than the curled types and is preferred for cooking.

'ENVY' RHS AGM
This variety has tightly curled dark green leaves, which are also very ornamental. Ideal for pot growing.

'GIGANTE NAPOLETANO'
As the name suggests, the leaves of this parsley are large and also very aromatic.

'TITAN'
A flat-leaved or French variety with small leaves and a strong, sweet parsley flavour.

Rosemary

An evergreen herb that looks lovely all year round, rosemary smells wonderful, has a great flavour and, when it flowers in late spring, bees love it, too. Grow it alongside a path and every time you brush past, the leaves will release their aromatic oils. What more could you ask?

	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
PLANT			●	●	●				●	●	●	
HARVEST	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●

HEIGHT x SPREAD 30cm-2m x 80cm-2m

AVG. YIELD Pick leaves as required

Planting

- Rosemary seeds can take an age to germinate, so buy young plants, which are widely available. Alternatively, wait until after flowering and take cuttings from existing plants.
- Plant in spring or autumn. Although rosemary is frost-hardy, a combination of cold and waterlogging can kill young plants, so choose a sunny, sheltered spot with free-draining soil. If you have cold clay soil, dig in lots of bark, grit or leafmould to improve the drainage.

Crop care

Rosemary needs little maintenance during the year, except cutting back after flowering to prevent plants becoming straggly and excessively woody. Save the trimmings to propagate new plants.

Rosemary does well in containers in a soil-based compost. Keep plants well watered during dry spells and feed with a general fertiliser during the growing season. In cold winters, bring the plants under cover for protection.

Harvesting

Gently pull small sprigs away from the main stem. Unless you're using them to flavour gravy or to perk up a roast, strip the leaves off the inedible woody stems.

Storage

As rosemary is an evergreen plant, it's available fresh all year round. It dries well (place sprigs on a baking tray in the airing cupboard) but it isn't suitable for freezing.

Troubleshooting

A native of southern Europe, the rosemary beetle and its larvae can quickly strip the foliage from a rosemary bush. These small, metallic green-and-purple striped beetles can be found on the underside of leaves during early autumn to spring. Spread some newspaper under an affected plant and tap the branches to dislodge the pests. If necessary, wait until after flowering to apply an organic insecticide to avoid harming bees.

Preparation and uses

Pop a few sprigs of rosemary in with roast potatoes and meat. It goes especially well with lamb, or in casseroles, tomato sauces, baked fish or egg dishes. Add it to vinegars or oils for extra flavour. Take care when using fresh rosemary in cooking, as it's a pungent herb that can overpower delicate flavours.

Pick rosemary all year round

TOP TIP

One of the best varieties for a hedge is 'Miss Jessopp's Upright'. Space the plants about 45cm apart.

5 TO TRY...

'BENENDEN BLUE'
A bushy plant with fine needles and dark blue flowers.

'LADY IN WHITE'
This variety's upright habit makes it useful as hedging.

'MAJORCA PINK'
Tall shrub with an upright habit and small pink flowers.

'MCCONNELL'S BLUE'
Blue flowers and a compact habit, so it grows well in pots.

'SUDBURY BLUE'
A fine-leaved, highly scented variety with blue flowers.

Sage

One garden herb that ticks all the right boxes is sage. It looks good and tastes great. Silvery evergreen leaves and pretty flowers – from intense blue to magenta or cream – make sage an attractive garden plant. And with literally hundreds of different types to choose from, there's one to suit every situation.

	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
SOW			●	●	●				●	●		
PLANT OUT				●	●							
HARVEST	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●

HEIGHT x SPREAD 60cm x 90cm

SPACING 1cm deep, 15cm apart, 30cm between rows

AVG. YIELD Pick leaves as required

Planting

- Annual and biennial sages are easy to grow from seed in spring. Start them off indoors, ready to plant out after the last frost has passed.
- Seed-sown perennial sage is slow to get going, but you can cut corners and buy young plants instead. You can also take 'soft tip' cuttings (the tip of a young shoot just below a leaf joint), which are quick to root in pots of damp sharp sand on a sunny windowsill.
- Sage isn't fussy about soil type – just choose a location that's free-draining. Cold, wet soil in winter will kill it, so make sure you dig in plenty of grit before planting. A spot in full sun will bring out the flavour in the leaves.
- If given good drainage and a soil-based compost, sage will do well in a large pot.

Crop care

After flowering, give the plants a gentle prune to stop them getting woody. Don't prune into the old wood, because it won't send out new shoots.

Some sages need frost protection, others will survive outside as long as their roots don't become waterlogged.

At the start and end of summer, sprinkle a couple of handfuls of bonemeal around sage plants, gently working it into the soil.

Perennial sage loses its vigour after about three or four years, so be ready to take cuttings in late spring – see tip right.

Harvesting

Perennial sages are evergreen, so you can harvest fresh leaves all year round. To enjoy the best flavour, pick them before the flowers appear, and wait until late morning or early evening when the aromatic oils are concentrated in the leaves.

Storage

Use sage fresh when you can. It also dries well, but develops a musty flavour if stored for too long.

Troubleshooting

Sage is usually trouble-free, although it can suffer from red spider mite and leafhoppers, which can discolour the leaves. Spray the leaves with a soap-based organic insecticide.

Variegated foliage

Salvia Officinalis

TOP TIP

Raise more plants by pinning down a low stem onto the soil with wire. Once well rooted, cut off the new plant and pot up.

Tangerine sage

Blackcurrant sage

Preparation and uses

Bring out the flavour of the leaves in winter by placing them in a sieve and pouring boiling water over them. This will stimulate the oils.

5 TO TRY...

BLACKCURRANT SAGE
Frost-hardy perennial variety with cerise flowers and blackcurrant-scented leaves.

SALVIA OFFICINALIS
This hardy evergreen has pale blue flowers and aromatic grey-green leaves.

S. LAVANDULIFOLIA
This frost-hardy perennial makes a neat, compact bush. It produces mauve flowers and aromatic leaves.

S. VIRIDIS COMATA
A half-hardy annual with red, blue and pink flowers that are great in fruit salads.

TANGERINE SAGE
A frost-hardy perennial with red flowers. Its tangerine-scented leaves make a great addition to fruit salads.

Sorrel

This herb makes a great alternative to spinach and the leaves have a tangier, slightly citrusy taste. A perennial plant, the leaves can be harvested through to late autumn. They can be grown as cut-and-come-again salad leaves, or left to mature and added to soups and sauces. Sorrel is easy to grow, with the plants producing an abundance of tasty leaves.

	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
SOW		●	●	●	●	●	●					
PLANT OUT					●	●	●					
HARVEST					●	●	●	●	●			

HEIGHT x SPREAD 90cm x 40cm

SPACING 1cm deep, 30cm apart, 30cm between rows

AVG. YIELD Pick leaves as required

Planting

- Sorrel thrives in a sunny or partially shady spot in fertile and moisture-retentive soil. It can be grown from seed but, as it's a perennial plant, you can take root cuttings or divide from an existing plant.
- Sow sorrel seeds in spring in small pots filled with seed compost, water well then place somewhere light. The seeds will take up to six weeks to germinate.
- When the seedlings are large enough to handle, pot them up into individual containers. You can grow them on in containers or plant out later into borders.

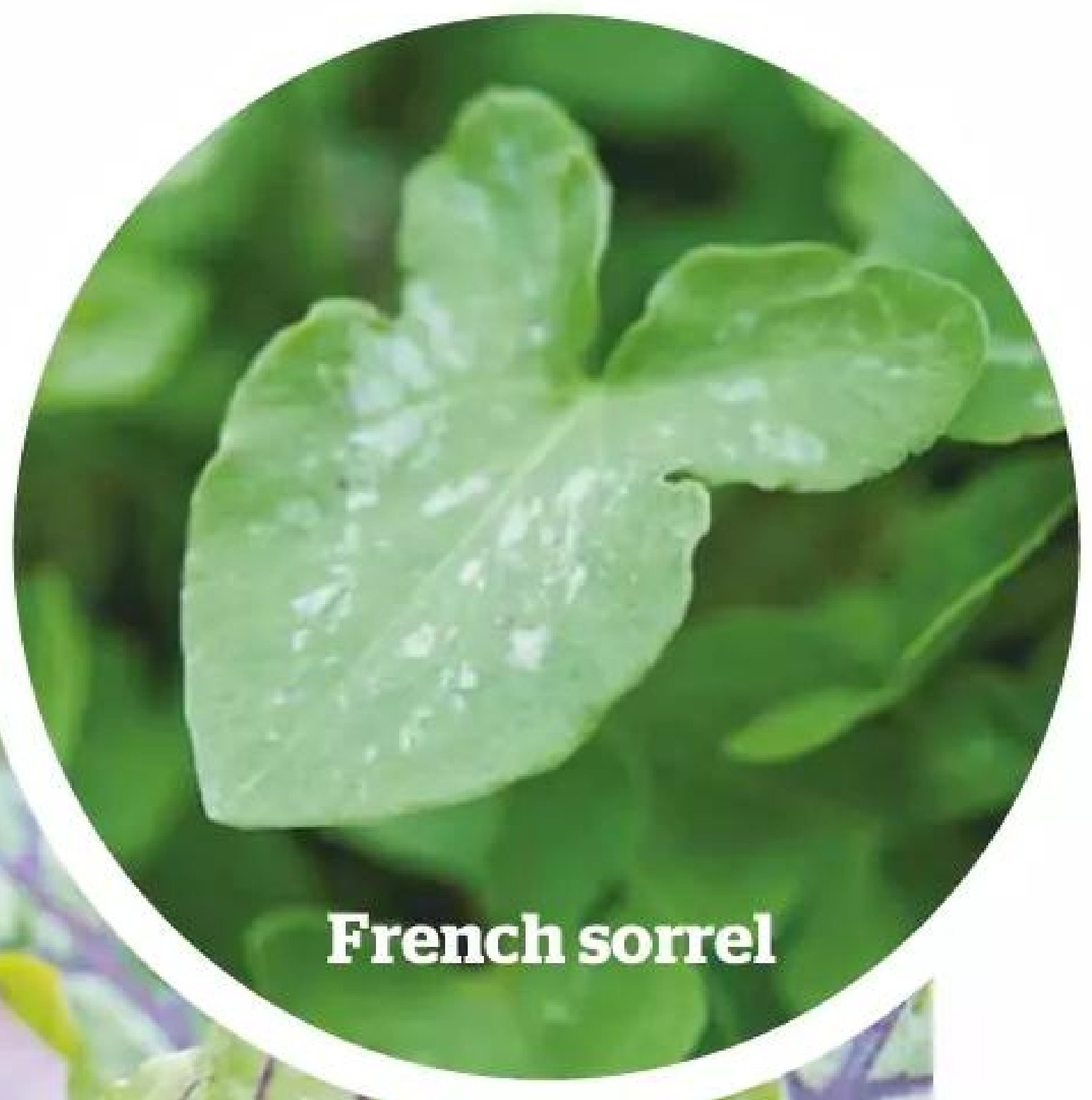
Crop care

Keep sorrel plants well watered, particularly during dry weather, which can make plants run to seed. Keeping them moist will also encourage plenty of fresh new growth.

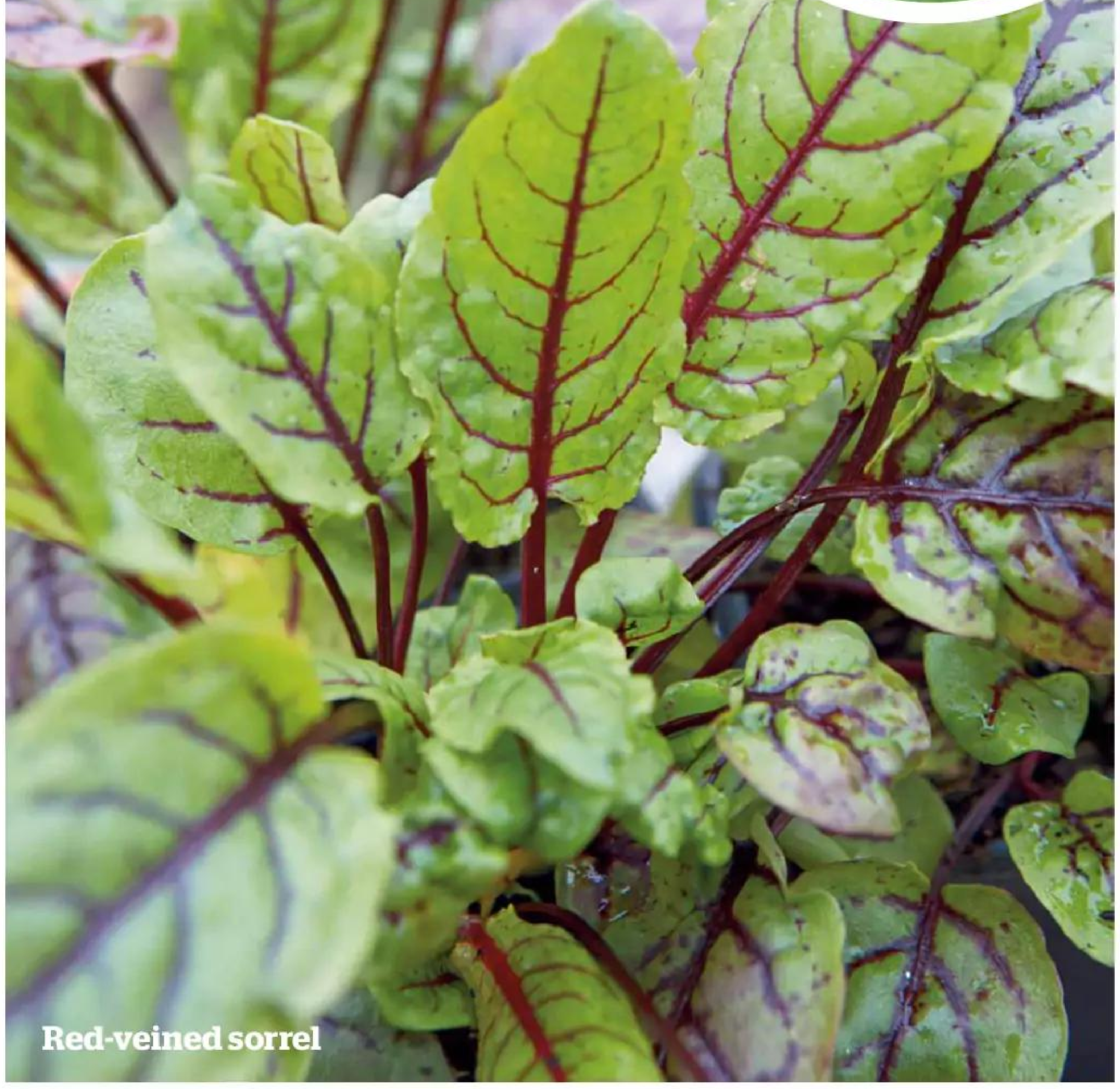
Once your sorrel plants are established, the foliage will die back over winter. Every few years, the plants should be divided in spring or autumn to rejuvenate them and ensure they keep producing good foliage.

Harvesting

Pick the leaves regularly through the growing season – this will encourage fresh new growth for salad leaves. For mature leaves, simply leave the plants for longer before harvesting.



French sorrel



Red-veined sorrel

Storage

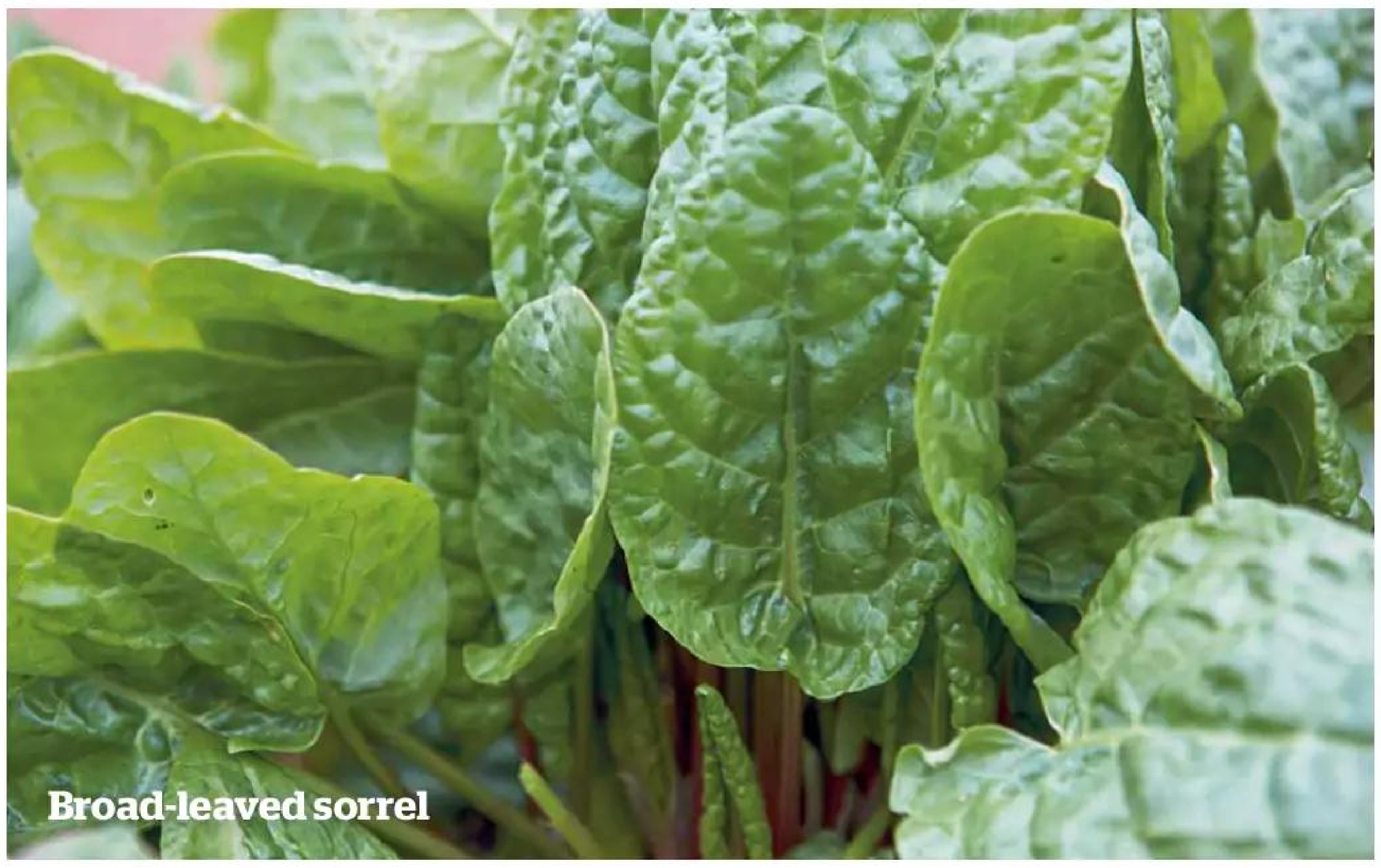
The leaves are best used fresh, but can be frozen for soups and sauces.

Troubleshooting

Sorrel is relatively trouble-free.

Preparation and uses

Young leaves make a zesty addition to salads. Mature leaves reduce substantially when cooked, so use a good quantity. Sorrel goes well with fish, meat and egg dishes.



Broad-leaved sorrel

5 TO TRY...

BROAD-LEAVED SORREL

This variety is easy to grow, producing masses of large, lance-shaped pale green leaves.

BUCKLER-LEAVED OR FRENCH SORREL

A low-growing, creeping sorrel that can be grown in a sunny or partially shady spot in moisture-retentive soil.

COMMON SORREL

This variety can grow to 1m high and has long, slender leaves. It is tolerant of shade.

RED-VEINED SORREL

Attractive sorrel with pointed lime-green leaves with dark red veins. The leaves are best used young and raw in salads.

'SILVER SHIELD'

A variety of Buckler-leaved sorrel with silvery-green leaves that have a slightly less acidic flavour.

Thyme

Thyme is easy to grow, looks attractive all year round, and there are nearly 200 different varieties to choose from. Leaf colour varies from dark green to golden yellow and variegated, and growth habit ranges from ground-hugging to upright. Many thymes also produce a mass of white, pink or lilac flowers over the summer.

	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
PLANT			●	●	●				●	●	●	
HARVEST	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●

HEIGHT x SPREAD 10-50cm x 10-50cm

AVG. YIELD Pick leaves as required

Planting

- Young plants are widely available and easier to establish than seedlings.
- Plant in free-draining soil or gravel in spring or autumn. If growing in a container, use a soil-based compost with plenty of grit and keep the pot raised off the ground to provide free drainage.
- Originally from the Mediterranean, thyme prefers free-draining soil that is low in nutrients.
- Planting it in full sun brings the essential oils to the surface of the leaves and gives it great flavour.
- Essentially drought-loving, thyme needs protection from cold winds and wet winters.

Crop care

Trim thyme plants after they have finished flowering to promote new growth. This will give you more leaves to harvest through the winter. If you don't tidy them up, the plants become woody and will need replacing after a few years.

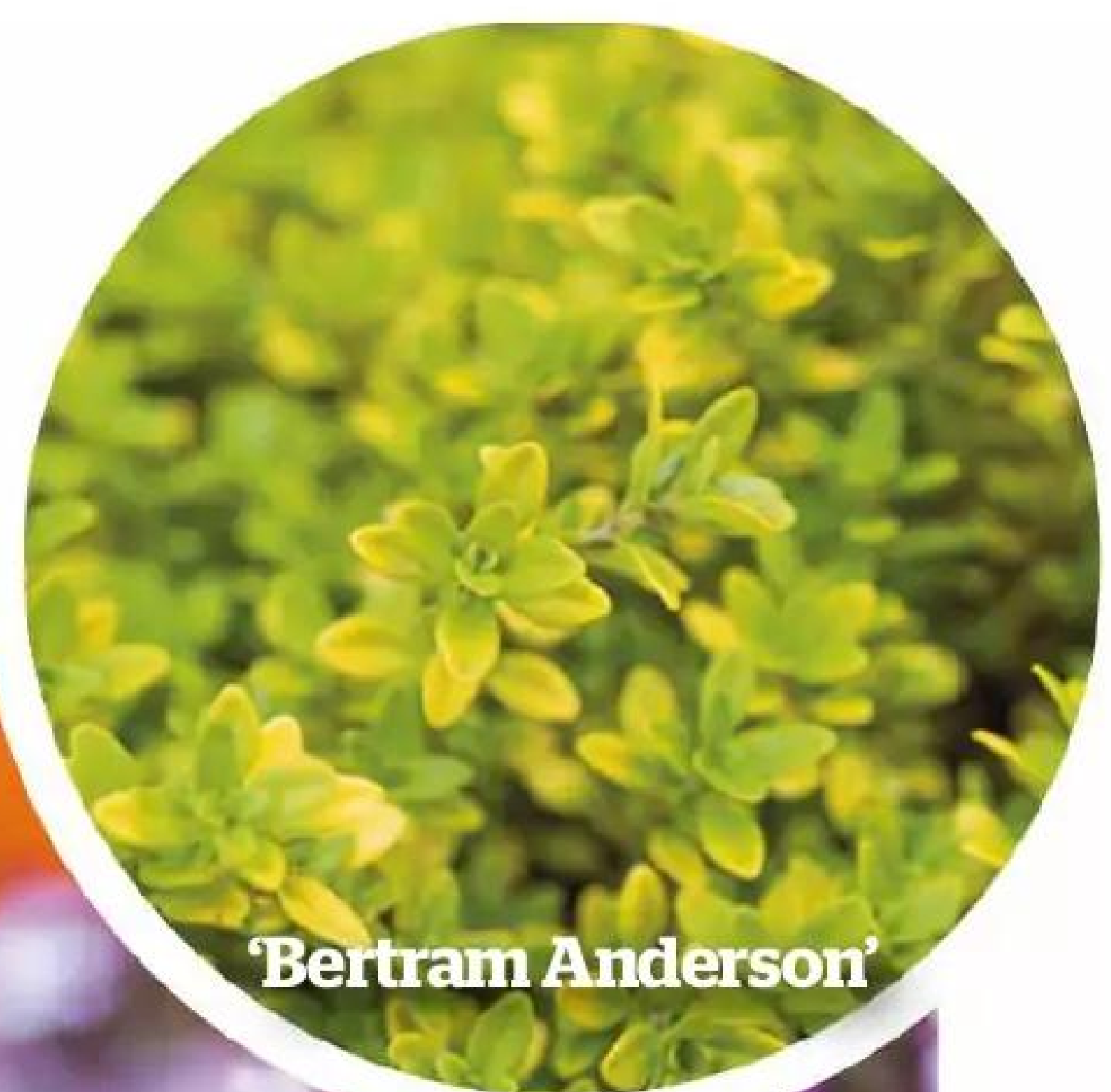
Once established, thyme won't need watering. If you're growing your plant in a container, give it a monthly feed of liquid seaweed from March until May.

Harvesting

Thyme is an evergreen perennial, so the leaves can be picked fresh all year round.

Storage

Thyme dries well, but the best method for preserving it is to add it to vinegar or olive oil. Pick the leaves in early summer, when the plant is at its most productive, either before flowering or in late summer after flowering.



'Bertram Anderson'

Thyme's flowers are a magnet to wildlife

TOP TIP

Thyme prefers almost drought conditions and minimal nutrients, so it won't grow happily with other herbs in mixed containers.

Troubleshooting

Thyme rarely suffers from any pests or diseases, although it can be susceptible to rosemary beetle (see Rosemary, p103).

Preparation and uses

Along with bay and rosemary, thyme is a key ingredient of bouquet garni, which is used to flavour many savoury dishes. The chopped leaves are also used in stuffings for pork and poultry. Lemon-scented thymes go particularly well with fish.

5 TO TRY...

'ANNIE HALL'
An especially attractive hardy evergreen with pale pink flowers and mid-green leaves.

'BERTRAM ANDERSON'
Particularly suitable for use in rock gardens or as path edging. Has pink flowers and golden leaves.

CARAWAY THYME
A robust-growing thyme with pink flowers and lemon/caraway-scented leaves.

CILICIAN THYME
This is a frost-hardy variety, bearing pink flowers and vivid green leaves.

'SILVER POSIE'
This hardy thyme has pale pink flowers and silvery-edged leaves.

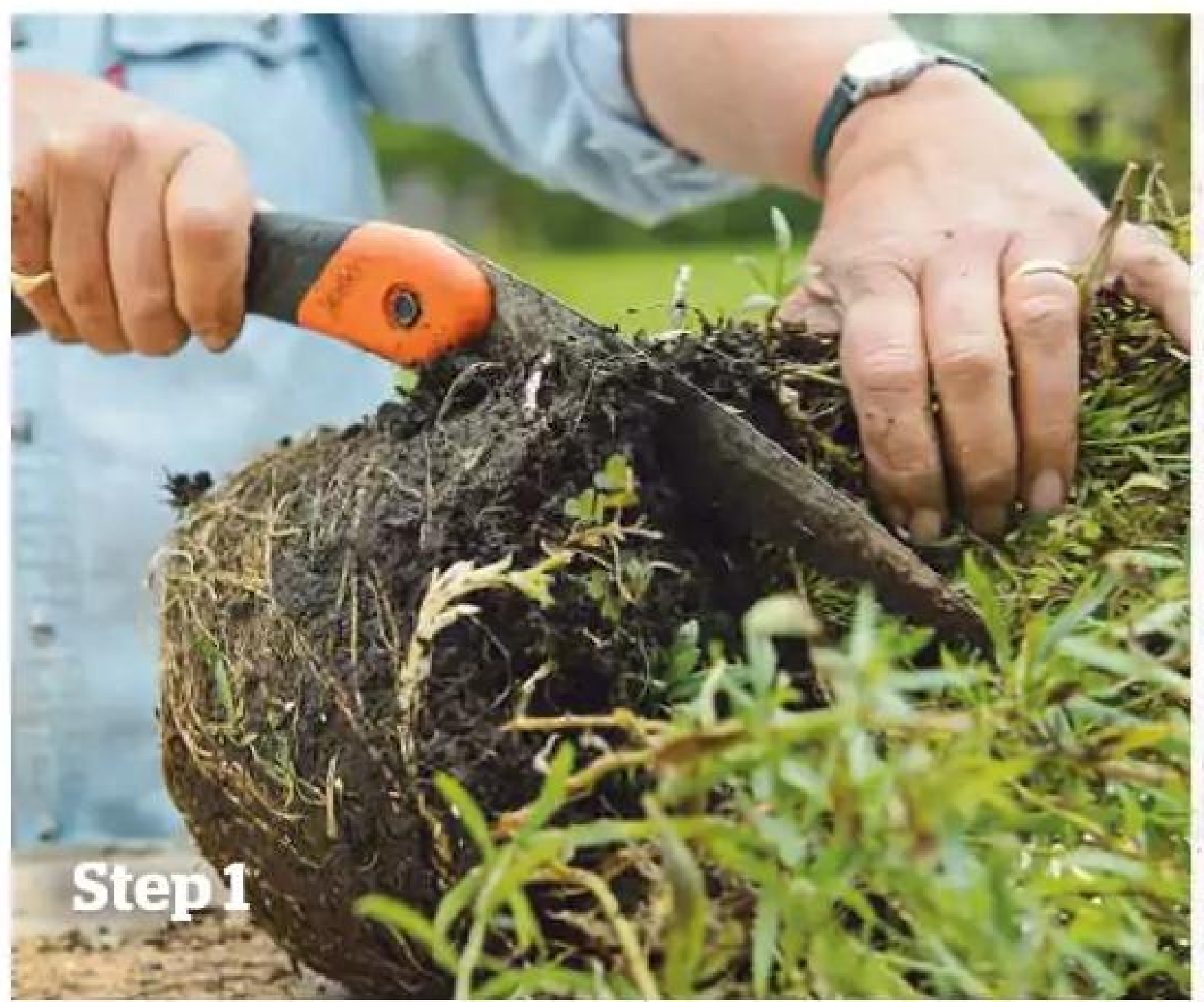
Tarragon

French tarragon is a perennial herb with a very distinctive flavour. The delicate, slightly aniseedy taste of the fine leaves works beautifully with fish and chicken dishes. Its Latin name is *Artemisia dracunculus* 'Sativa' and should not be confused with its Russian counterpart, *Artemisia dracunculus* 'Inodora', which is not nearly as flavoursome.

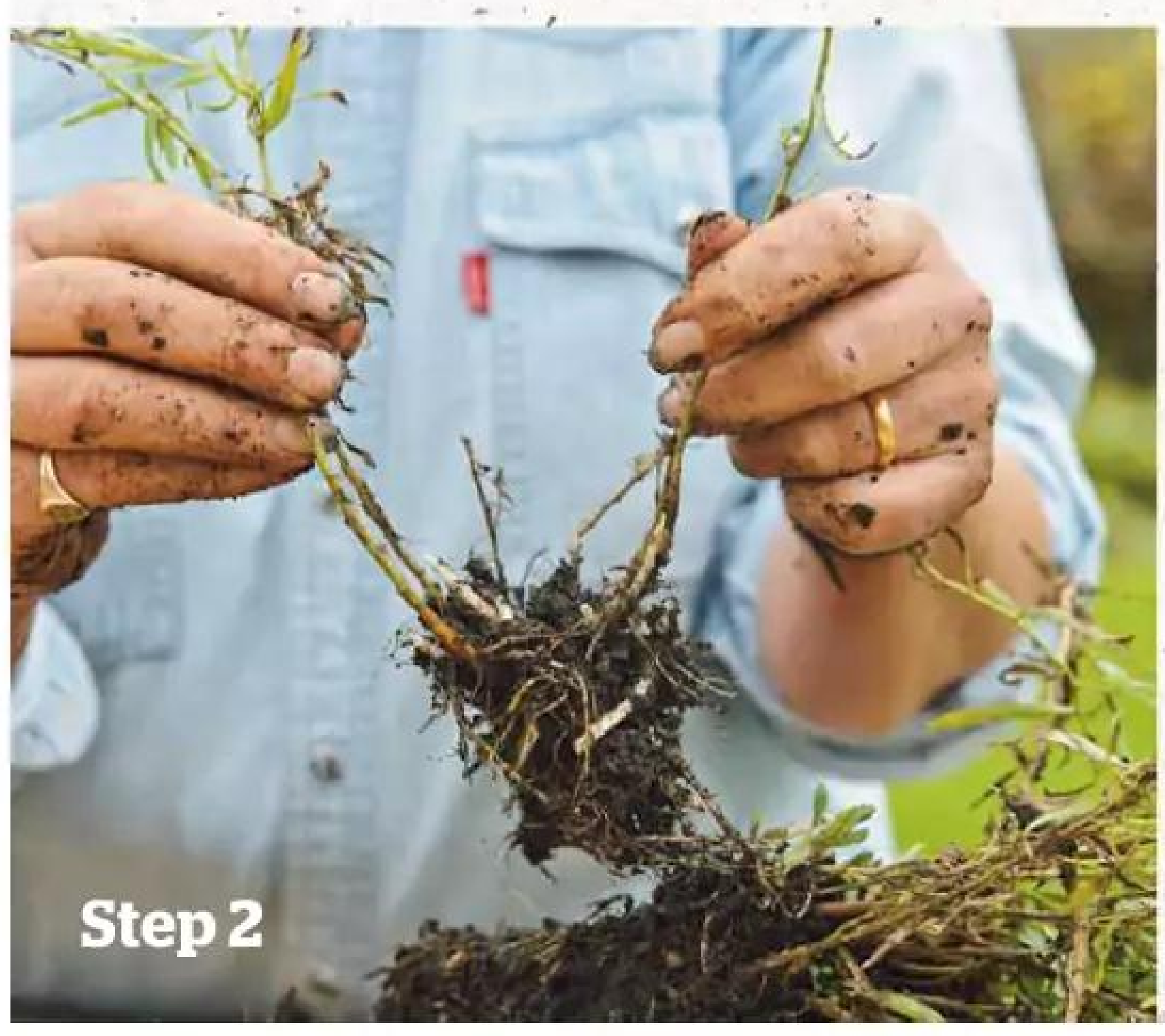
	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
PLANT				●	●	●	●	●				
HARVEST					●	●	●	●	●			

HEIGHT x SPREAD 90cm x 40cm

AVG. YIELD Pick leaves as required



Step 1



Step 2

Planting

- Tarragon does not flower or produce seed reliably, so it is best propagated by root division or cuttings.

1) Remove a large pot-bound plant from its pot and saw the rootball in half. Repot one half in fresh compost.

2) The remaining half can be divided to take root cuttings. Cut off the top growth from the cuttings and prune the roots. Plant in individual modules, cover with fresh compost and leave until they produce new shoots, then pot up again.

- If you can't take cuttings from a friend, it's best to buy small plants.

Crop care

Make sure you water your tarragon plants regularly, but do not overwater – watch out for plants standing in water during periods of wet weather.

Pick the leaves frequently to encourage the production of fresh new leaves. As long as your plants don't flower the leaves will keep coming, so nip out any buds that do make an appearance.

French tarragon is borderline hardy, so move to a sheltered position in winter. The leafy top will die back over winter, but should show signs of new growth in early spring. Plants will keep going for a few years, but will naturally tire and produce less growth after about three years.

French tarragon

Russian tarragon

Harvesting

Snip off shoots and pick leaves off the stems as and when you need them through the growing season.

Storage

Tarragon leaves are best frozen for future use, but they can be dried and stored.

Troubleshooting

Tarragon is relatively trouble-free apart from powdery mildew which can occur when plants are stressed due to a lack of water. The white coating on leaves is quite easily recognisable and will cause the leaves to drop.

Preparation and uses

Chop leaves very finely and add to chicken and fish dishes and accompanying sauces.

TOP TIP

Tarragon is a good companion planting herb as the distinctive scent of the leaves is not popular with many pests.

2 TO TRY...

FRENCH TARRAGON

Long, narrow green leaves with a strong flavour. Can reach up to 90cm in height.

RUSSIAN TARRAGON

The leaves are longer and narrower than French tarragon with a milder flavour. Also reaches 90cm.

Grow your own
Practical know-how

Discover how to get a good harvest and tackle problems with our expert guide to successful growing –from top watering tips to an in-depth guide to pests and diseases

When you're just beginning to grow your own veg, success is all important, so stick to easy crops that give you rich reward – runner beans, courgettes, potatoes, salads and onions from sets are all good options.

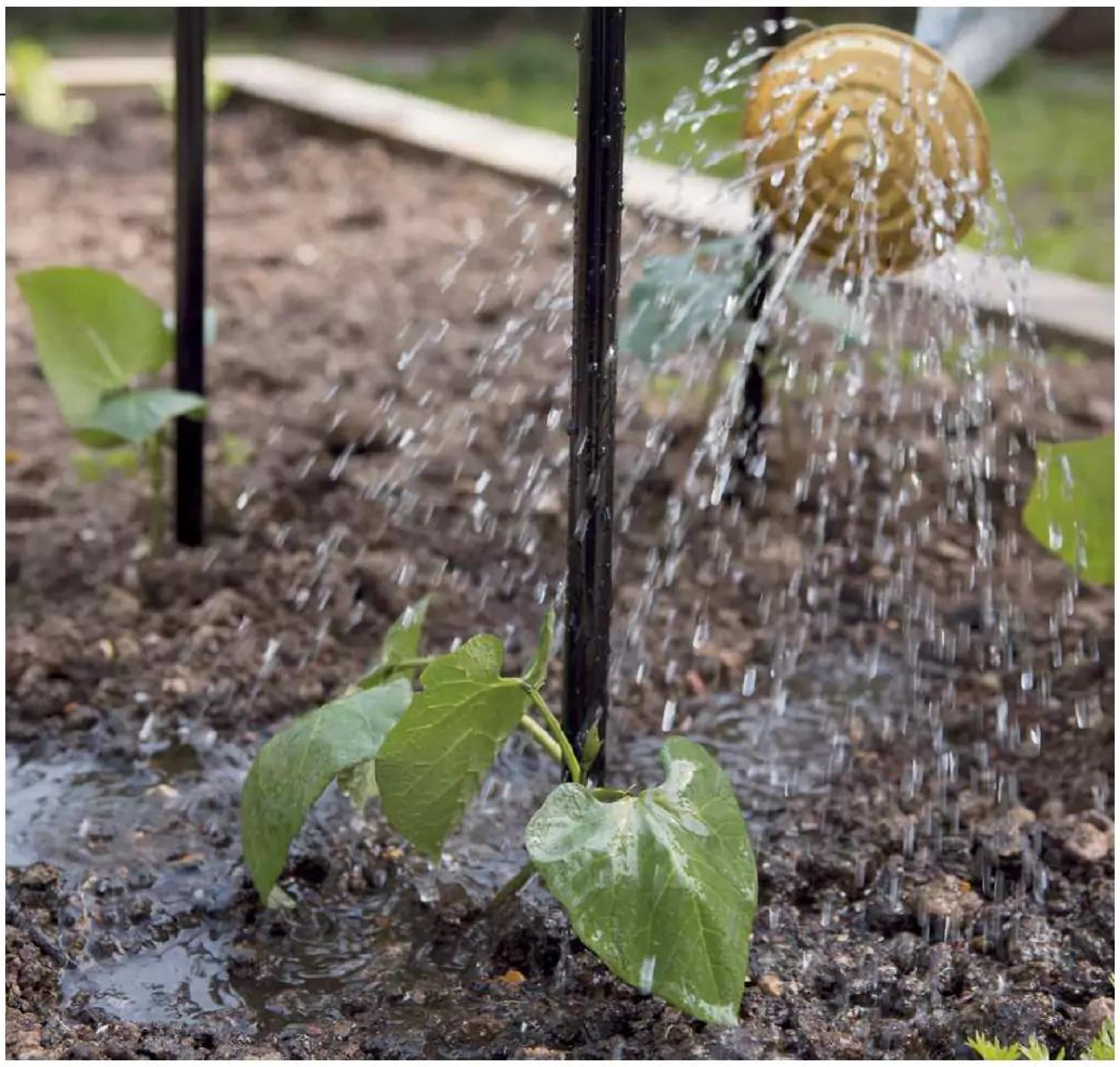
It's vital to give your crops enough food and water, and keep weeding around your plants to get the best results. Check through the season for pests and diseases, but don't panic if you have a few problems, or if some crops don't perform as well as they might – you'll still be rewarded with some kind of harvest. There are many ways to combat problems, especially if you spot them early. Try encouraging as many beneficial insects into your garden as possible to help keep down pests naturally – hoverflies and their larvae feast on aphids, while birds and wasps eat caterpillars.

Finally, don't forget to keep on top of harvesting and watering through the growing season – those are the most important jobs of all.

How to...

Look after your crops

Find out how to give your plants everything they need to ensure a successful growing season



Plants don't look after themselves. But just a few simple tasks, such as regular watering and feeding, will help to keep them strong and healthy.

When we cultivate them intensively in our gardens or in containers they benefit from a little extra feeding during the growing season to produce a good crop.

As well as nourishment, crops such as beans and peas need support, while early-sown and winter crops may need protection from frost.

Protect over winter

Unless plants are fully hardy, they need protection from frost and freezing temperatures. If you're overwintering crops, making early sowings or have fruit trees that flower early in the year, cover them with horticultural fleece, grow them under cloches or insulate their crowns or roots with a mulch of straw or leaves. Bring pots under cover into a cool conservatory or greenhouse over winter.

Feed your plants

Crops require a balance of three types of nutrients – major and minor nutrients and trace elements. They use major nutrients in fairly large amounts – nitrogen to produce strong leaves and shoots, phosphorus for root development, and potassium to promote abundant flowering and fruiting. Minor nutrients (magnesium, calcium and sulphur) are needed in smaller amounts, as are the trace elements (copper, boron, iron, manganese and zinc). Most of these nutrients are included in general plant feeds, while specialist plant feeds are often higher in one type of major nutrient, depending on their purpose.

Add a layer of mulch

Spread mulch in a thick layer (up to 8cm deep) over the surface of the soil in your veg patch, or on top of compost in a container, to seal in moisture and help to suppress weeds (which compete with your plants for moisture, food, light and space). You won't get a good harvest if your crops are overwhelmed by weeds. Well-rotted garden compost or farmyard manure, which will also feed your plants as it rots down, is ideal.

Water regularly

When a plant is left to dry out, it starts to wilt. This causes it to become stressed and its yields drop. It will also become more vulnerable to pests and diseases.

- How often you need to water depends on how hot it is and what type of soil you have. Clay holds moisture, while sandy soil dries out quickly.
- Avoid the little and often approach to watering. It's better to water less frequently but more deeply. If the soil is dry to a depth of 15cm, then you will need to water it.
- There are times when crops need more water – for example, when they're flowering or fruiting, or if they're leafy like sweetcorn and they lose a lot of moisture through their foliage (a process called transpiration).
- The best time to water crops is first thing in the morning, so that moisture has a chance to sink into the soil before evaporating. The next best time is late evening.
- If using a hosepipe, direct the flow to the root area, rather than on to leaves.
- Use a watering can fitted with a fine rose to water seeds and seedlings, to avoid disturbing the soil. Remove the rose to water containers or to deliver a liquid feed.

Provide support

Tall, leggy vegetables and climbing crops need supports to stop their stems snapping in the wind. Ideally, put supports in place at the time of planting. As they grow, tie climbers to trellis or posts with garden twine. Push twiggy pea sticks into the ground to support weak-stemmed crops or tie them individually to bamboo canes.

How to...

Garden for wildlife

Make a few changes to your gardening habits to encourage more beneficial creatures to your plot

Many gardeners reach for chemical pesticides whenever they spot a pest, but using these man-made substances can upset your garden's natural balance. Adopt some simple organic gardening techniques and you'll still be able to enjoy bumper crops, while having a garden that is literally buzzing with beneficial wildlife. Rather than relying on an arsenal of chemicals to control pests, it makes sense to attract wildlife into your garden to do the job for you. Ladybirds, lacewings, hedgehogs, frogs, toads, spiders, birds and many other beneficial types of wildlife have a ravenous appetite for creatures that we're not so happy to see in the garden.

Try companion planting

An essential technique for organic growing is companion planting, where two or more different plants are grown together for the benefit of the crop you wish to nurture. Aromatic plants can be interspersed with edibles to hide a crop's smell from pests, while some flowers can be grown to attract pests so they leave your crops alone. Flowering plants are also grown close to crops to attract pollinating insects. So try using some tried-and-tested partnerships such as growing basil with tomatoes; chives with carrots; or roses near garlic.

Create wildlife habitats

Many creatures shelter or hibernate in overgrown patches, while insects often like to overwinter in the hollow stems of perennials and other plants or hide under fallen leaves. Resist the temptation to tidy up your garden until spring and turn a blind eye to a little messiness. Although a combination of the right plants and a more relaxed attitude to maintenance will be appreciated by wildlife, make sure you install some bug boxes too, to give insects plenty of additional places to hibernate or hide in.

Encourage beneficial insects

Ladybirds and lacewings love to eat aphids, while spiders catch other flying pests in their webs. Thrushes feed on snails, while hedgehogs and toads feast on slugs. To make your garden more wildlife-friendly, avoid using chemical controls and grow flowers, trees, climbers and shrubs that are known to be beneficial. Try lavender, ivy and crab-apple trees. Include plenty of native plants and wildflowers as well as wildlife-friendly ornamental plants.

Go organic

Many gardeners grow their own because they want food that isn't produced using man-made fertilisers or chemicals. Avoid using pesticides, weedkillers and fungicides in favour of controlling pests by hand or encouraging wildlife. Grow plants as healthily and organically as possible to help them avoid disease. To garden organically, gardeners feed the soil and grow crops that aren't martyrs to problems.

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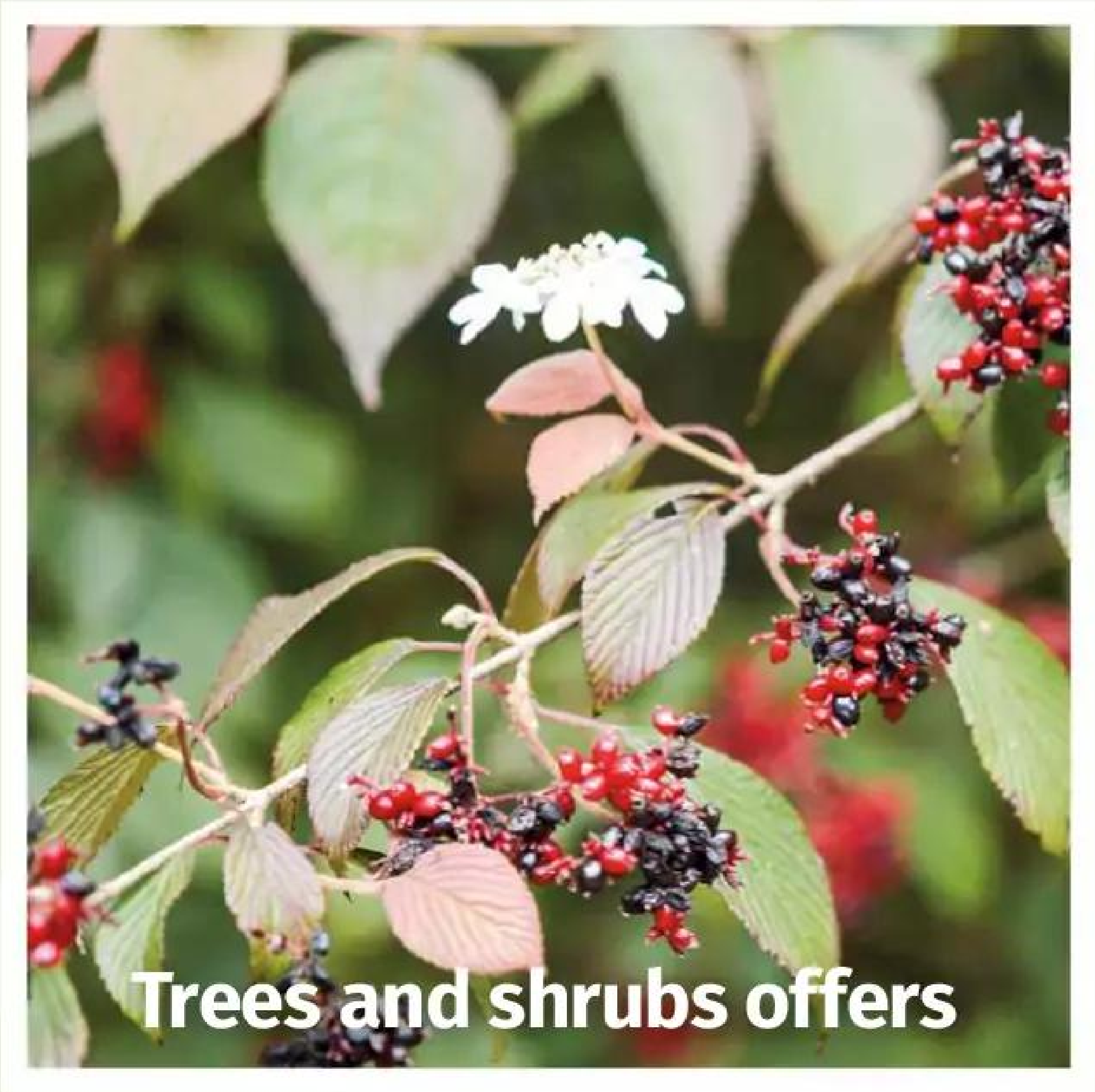

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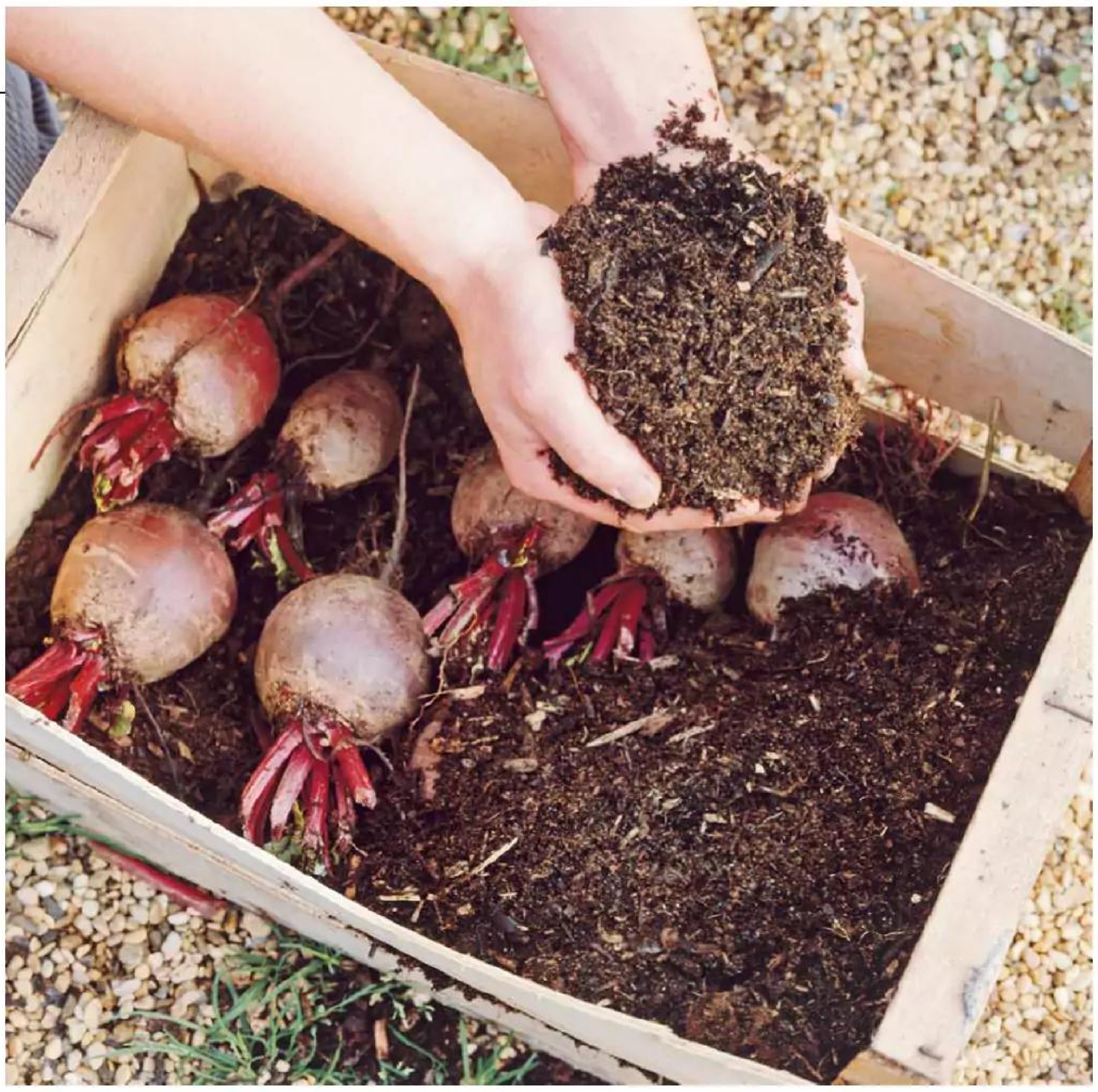
How to...

Harvesting & storing

You've grown your favourites, but now what? Find out when to harvest, how to store your crops for maximum shelf-life and how to preserve them



It's important to harvest crops at the right time to get the best flavour and maximum nutrients. If you pick crops when they are under-ripe or over-ripe, or when they've been left on the plant so long that they've become woody, stringy or so swollen with water, they will have lost virtually all their flavour. At the end of summer you may have a glut of produce, but there are plenty of ways to ensure you avoid waste – from making chutneys and preserves to freezing excess veg, such as runner beans and raspberries, and storing root veg through the winter.

Pick at the right time

It's possible to tell when many crops are ready for harvesting by looking at them or giving them a squeeze. You'll know if broad beans are ready by squeezing the pods to feel the beans inside. But how do you tell if a crop that grows underground is ready for digging up? Early potatoes should be lifted when they're flowering, while beetroot should be harvested when they're about 5cm in diameter. Other crops hide behind foliage – the large leaves of courgettes often conceal the young fruits, so check plants regularly to see if any are ready for picking. Test sweetcorn cobs when the tassels turn brown – simply prick a few kernels with your fingernail, and if milky sap flows out it's ready to eat. Some plants produce a single harvest, while others are more prolific – the more you pick, the more they grow, like salad leaves.

Get preserving

Beans, aubergines and plums are perfect for chutneys, while beetroot, peppers, onions and any green tomatoes left at the end of the outdoor growing season are delicious pickled. And what better way to use up summer berries than in a scrumptious jam.

Make fruit last

Apples and pears should last several months if placed on slatted trays, but make sure they don't touch their neighbours. Check regularly to ensure they're healthy, and discard any with signs of disease as this can spread.

Store root veg

Maincrop potatoes can be stored in paper sacks, and carrots and beets in wooden trays. Add a layer of dry compost or sand to the trays, then lay the roots on top, ensuring they're not touching; cover with another layer of compost or sand.

Freeze gluts

If you have a glut of sweetcorn, peas or runner beans, they can all be frozen. Surplus tomatoes can be made into sauces, then decanted into bags and put in the freezer. To freeze excess veg, boil a large pan of water. Put water and ice in large bowls and prepare the veg as if for eating. Blanch peas for 1 min; sliced runners 2-3 mins; sweetcorn for 5-8 mins. Cool quickly under the cold tap then in the bowls of iced water. Drain well, pat dry and freeze in freezer bags or open-freeze the veg, spaced apart on trays before packing into the bags. Cook all veg from frozen.

Store onions and cabbages

Most veg are best kept in a place that's frost-free and not too warm – a shed or garage is ideal. Onions and garlic can be stored in net bags suspended above the floor to allow air to reach them and prevent damp. They can also be plaited and hung to dry from the ceiling in a shed or greenhouse.

How to...

Compost & save water

Move your garden closer to self-sufficiency by harnessing worms, water and waste

Whether you're concerned about the environment or want to save yourself some money, composting your waste and recycling water will have a positive impact on your garden, helping to keep soil and crops healthy.

When you grow your own fruit and veg, you'll generate lots of waste that can be recycled. Peelings, prunings, damaged crops, empty pods and spent plants that have been harvested can all be consigned to the compost bin. Here, conditions make the plant material rot down quickly into compost that can be used as a mulch or dug into the soil to improve its fertility.

Add the right materials

Do add

✔ Vegetable and fruit peelings
✔ Trimmings and leftovers
✔ Tea and coffee dregs
✔ Torn paper and card
✔ Soft plant waste
✔ Lawn mowings
✔ Farm manure
✔ Leafy weeds
✔ Straw
✔ Eggshells
✔ Shredded prunings

Don't add

✘ Perennial or seedling weeds
✘ Synthetic materials
✘ Meat and fish scraps
✘ Cat and dog faeces
✘ Diseased plants
✘ Plastics, metal and glass

Make leafmould

Fallen leaves can be turned into leafmould and used as a mulch or a conditioner to boost the water-retaining capacity of your soil. If you have a big garden, make a square bin for storing the leaves using four tree stakes and chicken wire. If you don't have room for that, store the leaves in bin liners – make a few holes in them to help drainage. When full, place in a shady spot. By next autumn, the leaves will have become a crumbly material, ideal for mulching. If you leave it another year it will rot down into compost that you can dig into the soil.

Install a water butt

It makes sense to save and recycle rainwater using a water butt. You'll be easing the demands on reservoirs and underground aquifers and saving money if your water supply is metered. Water butts come in an array of shapes, from compact, slimline models to huge tanks holding up to 2,000 litres. They can be easily fitted to the downpipe of a house or a garden building that has guttering. If you don't have the necessary pipework, consider fitting it.

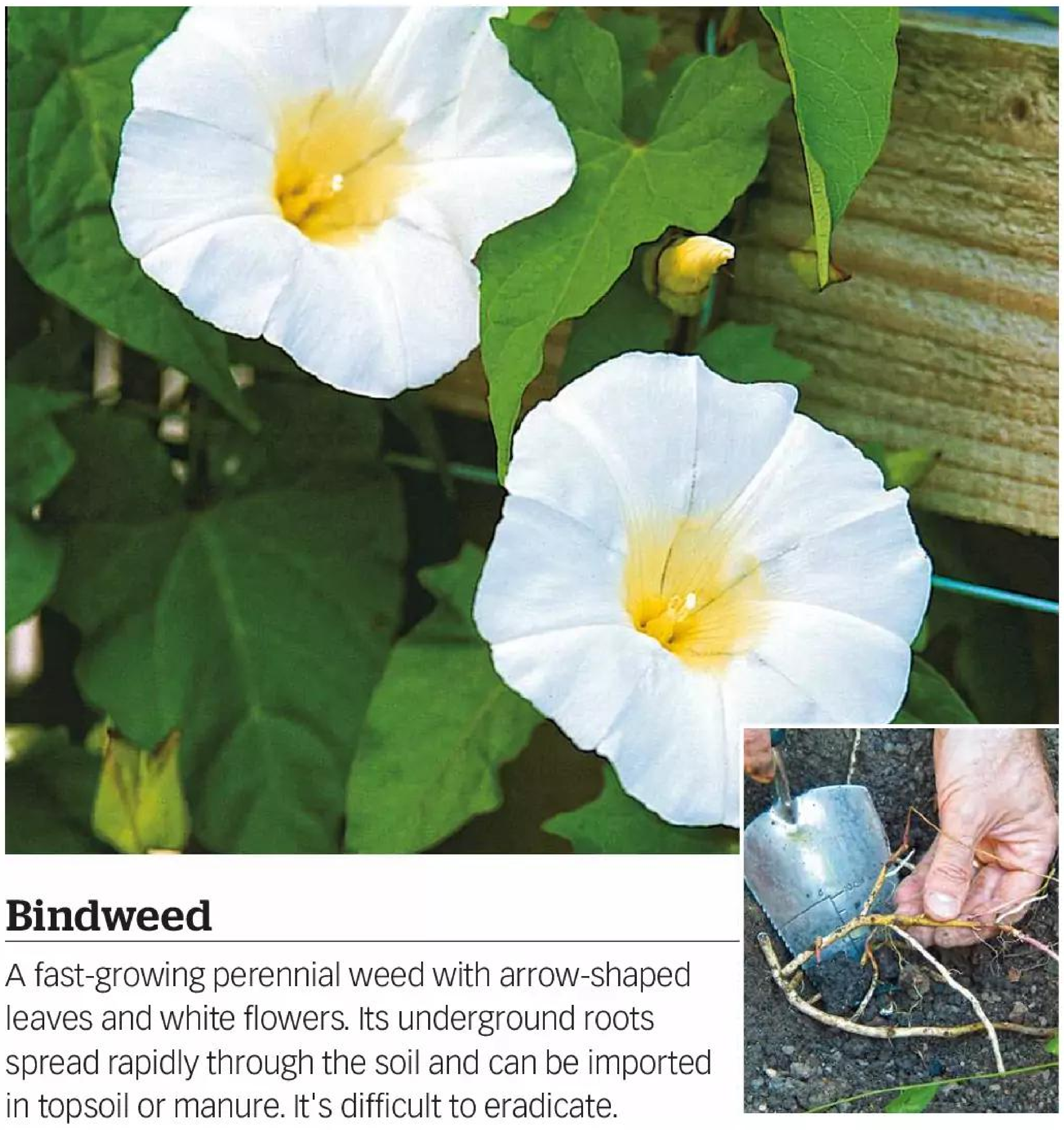
Set up a wormery

If you don't have space for a compost bin, try a wormery instead. Compact enough to be pushed into a corner, this series of tiered trays is too small to compost general garden waste, but the army of worms inside will turn vegetable peelings, old tea bags, coffee grounds, spent flowerheads and shredded newspaper into crumbly compost that can be used to improve your soil. There is also a sump at the bottom of the wormery that collects liquid from above – once diluted, this makes a nutritious liquid plant food.

Choose the right compost bin

There are plenty of bins to suit every style of garden – along with every wallet – from black plastic domes to pretty bins disguised as beehives. If you don't want anything that fancy, be inspired by allotment holders and make one by knocking together a few pallets. Even small gardens can include a compost bin, as there is one to suit every situation. Stand it on bare soil for best results.

Weed control guide

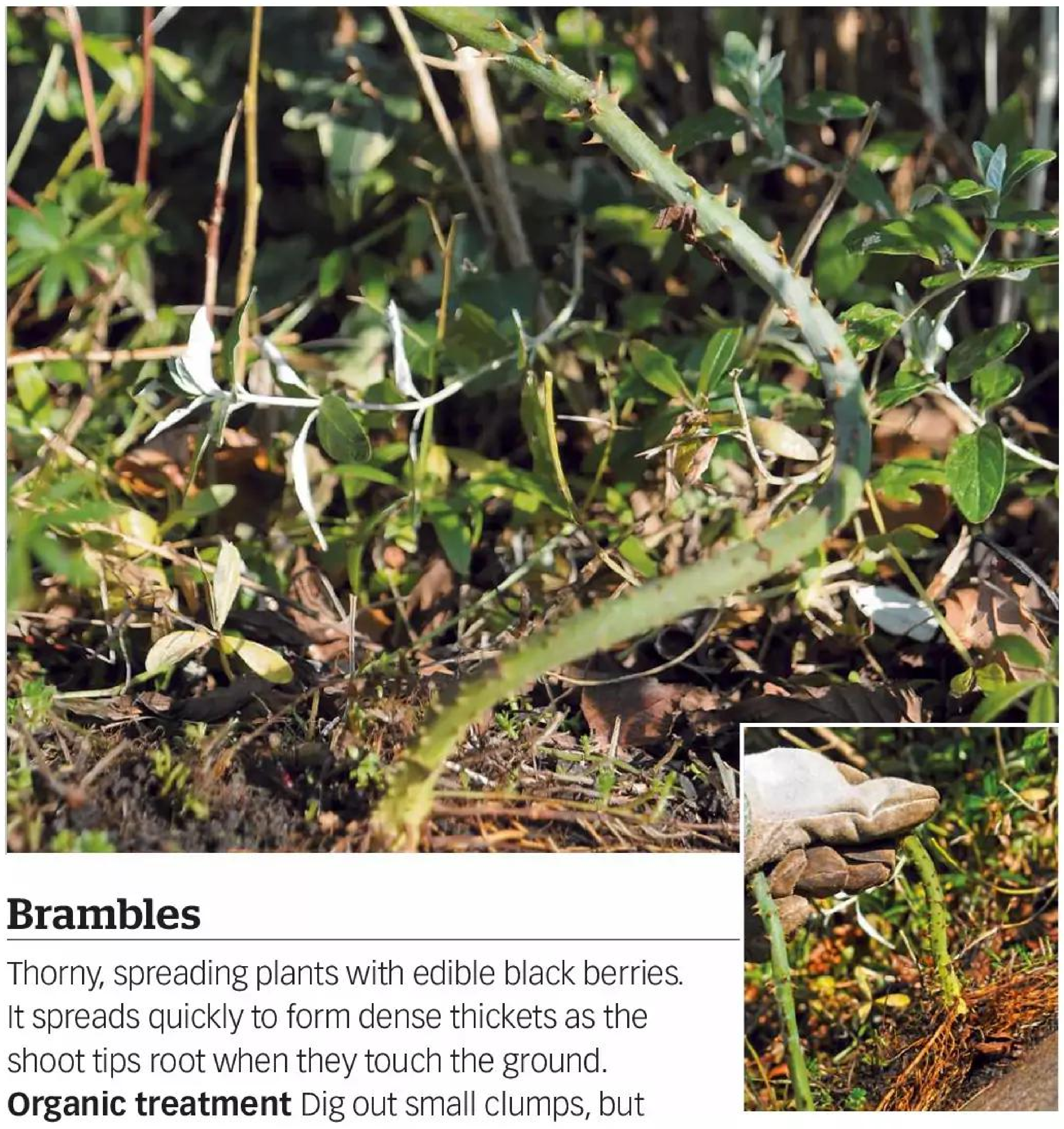


Bindweed

A fast-growing perennial weed with arrow-shaped leaves and white flowers. Its underground roots spread rapidly through the soil and can be imported in topsoil or manure. It's difficult to eradicate.

Organic treatment Dig out thoroughly as it can regenerate from a tiny piece of root left in the soil. Use a fork to avoid breaking up the root.

Chemical treatment Use a total weedkiller. This is most effective when the weed is flowering, although it will still work on good leaf coverage.

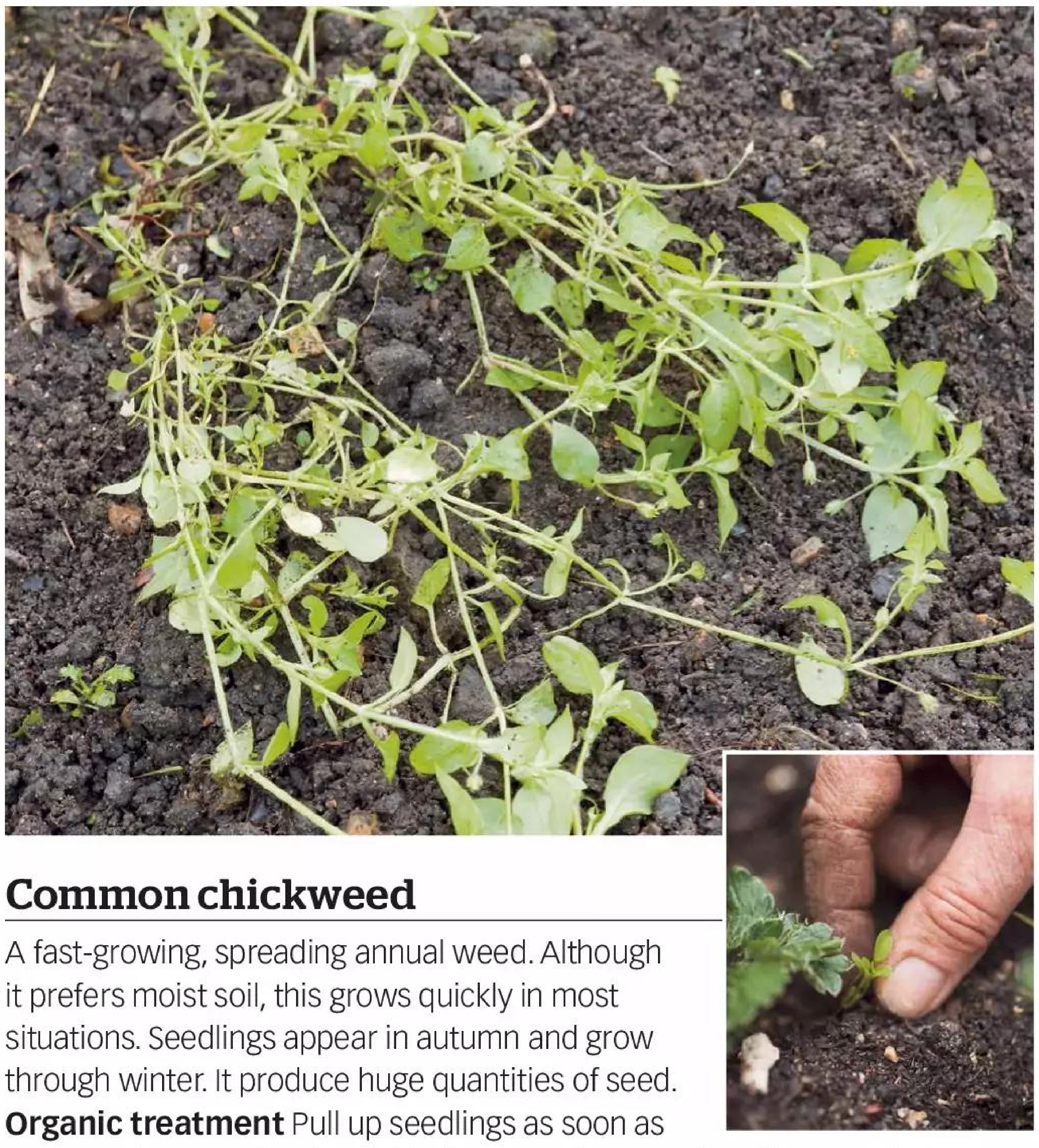


Brambles

Thorny, spreading plants with edible black berries. It spreads quickly to form dense thickets as the shoot tips root when they touch the ground.

Organic treatment Dig out small clumps, but remove every last bit of root. Wear gloves when handling the stems as they're armed with vicious thorns. Dense thickets need tougher treatment.

Chemical treatment Cut back stems of established plants, and treat the regrowth in spring and summer with brushwood killer.

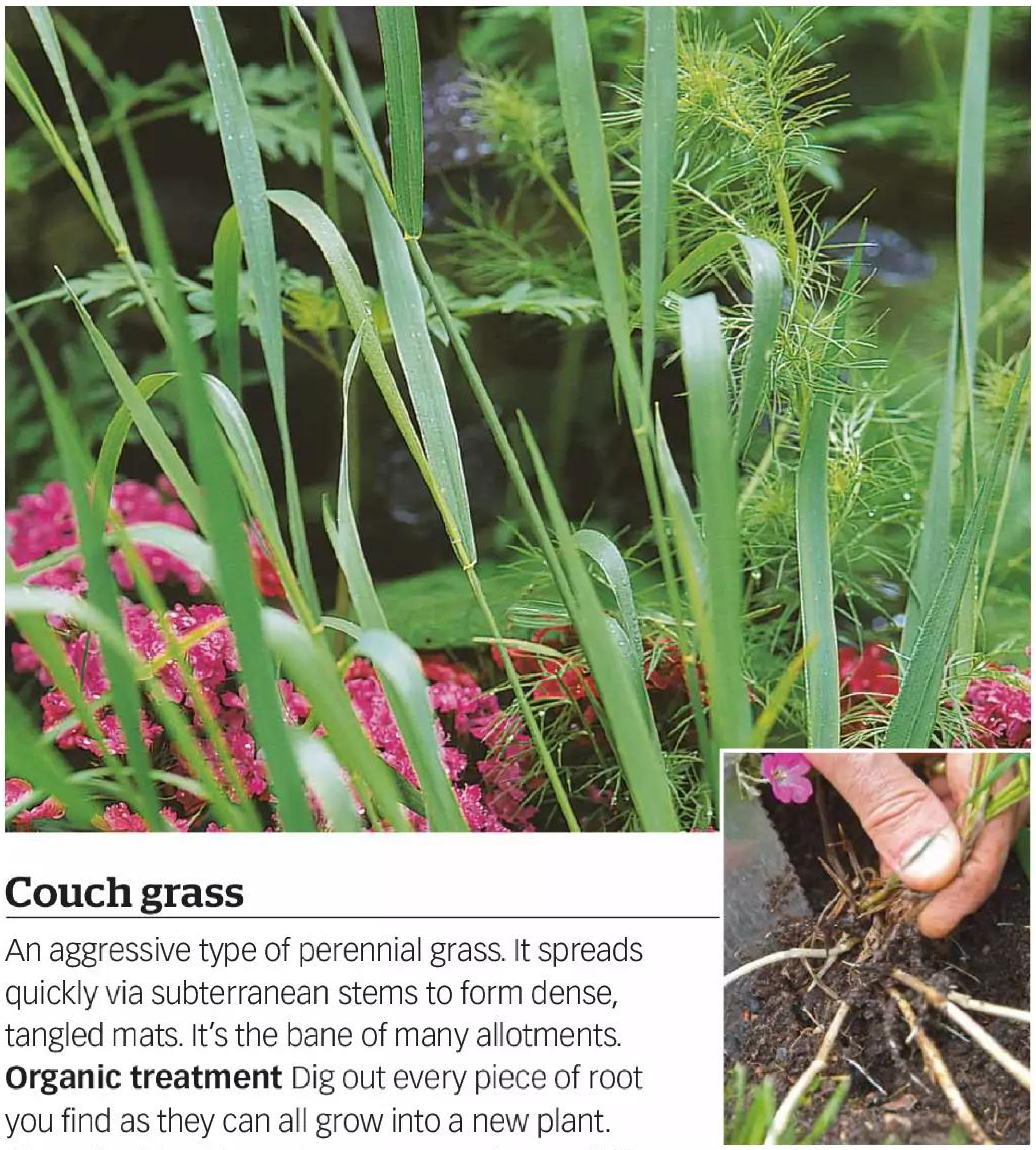


Common chickweed

A fast-growing, spreading annual weed. Although it prefers moist soil, this grows quickly in most situations. Seedlings appear in autumn and grow through winter. It produce huge quantities of seed.

Organic treatment Pull up seedlings as soon as you spot them, as they'll quickly flower and set seed, and hoe regularly.

Chemical treatment Use a total weedkiller. Avoid spraying on a windy day, or when the weed is near other desirable plants.



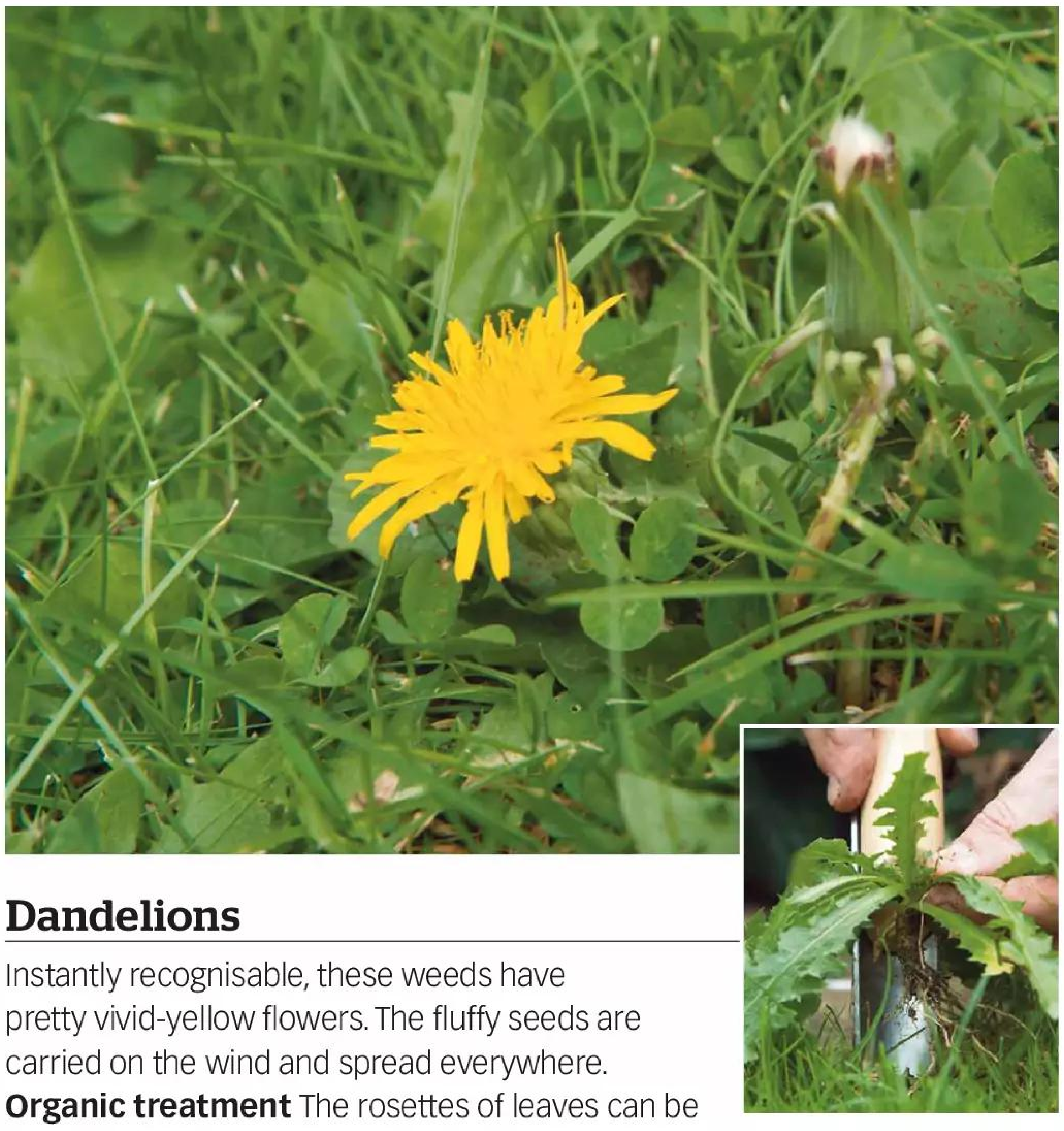
Couch grass

An aggressive type of perennial grass. It spreads quickly via subterranean stems to form dense, tangled mats. It's the bane of many allotments.

Organic treatment Dig out every piece of root you find as they can all grow into a new plant.

Chemical treatment Use a systemic weedkiller on couch grass in spring. Re-apply throughout the growing season at four- to six-week intervals.

Weeds will compete with your crops for water, nutrients and space. Remove them all before you sow, then set a little time aside each week to keep on top of them

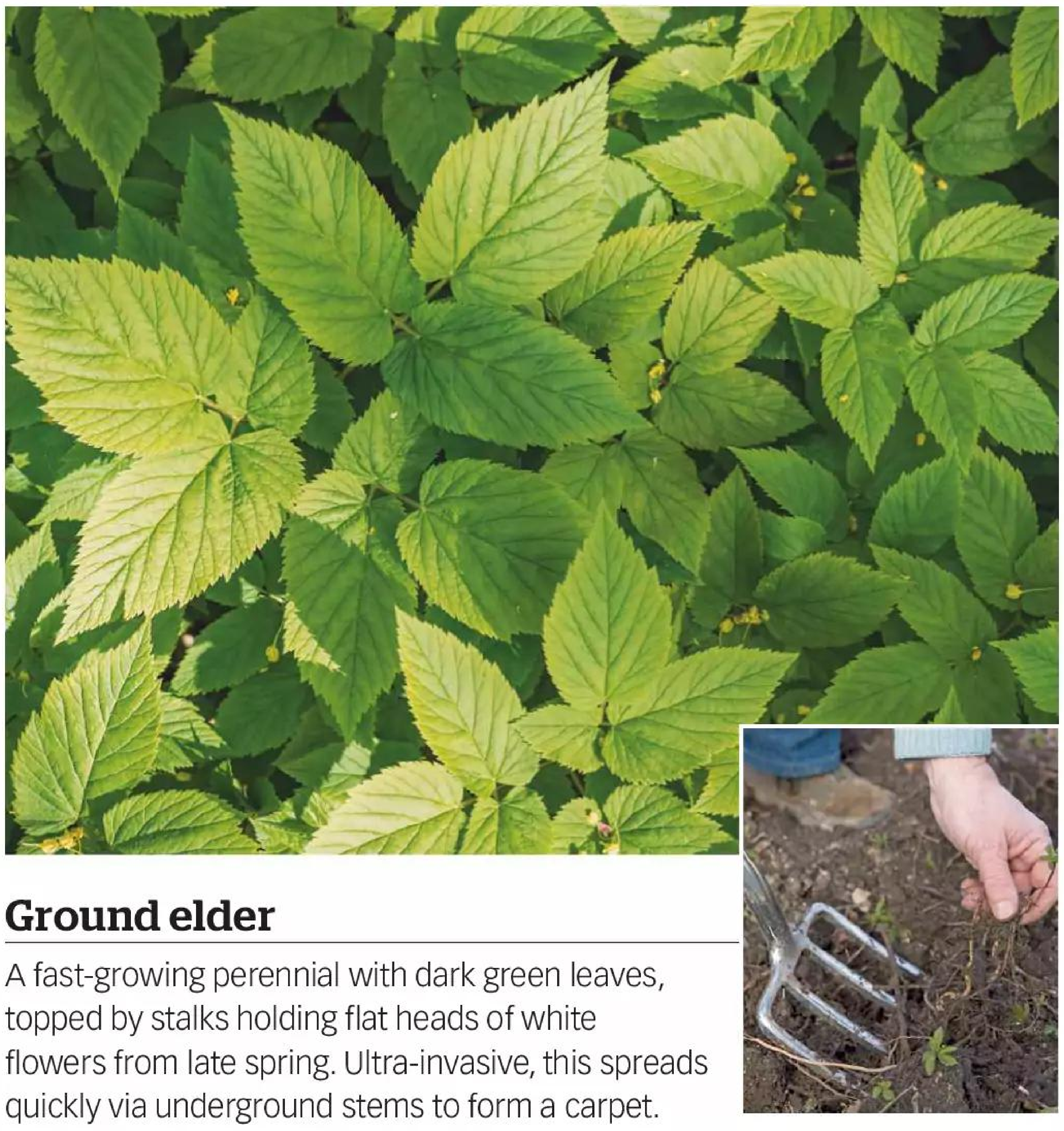


Dandelions

Instantly recognisable, these weeds have pretty vivid-yellow flowers. The fluffy seeds are carried on the wind and spread everywhere.

Organic treatment The rosettes of leaves can be dug out of lawns and borders, but dig deep to ensure the taproot is removed.

Chemical treatment Dandelions in paving or borders can be treated with a systemic weedkiller. A selective lawn weedkiller or a lawn feed and weed product can be used on dandelions growing in lawns.

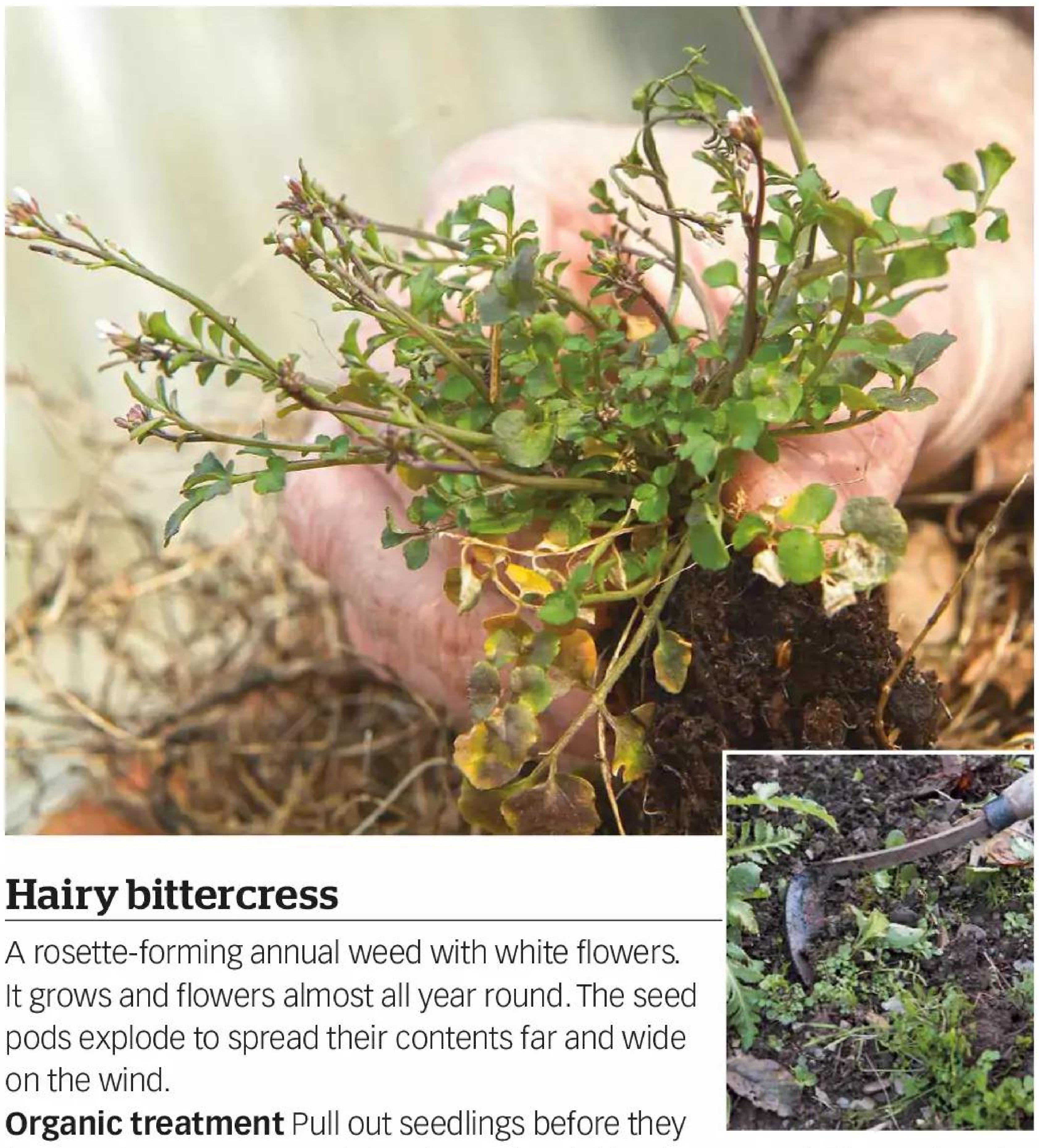


Ground elder

A fast-growing perennial with dark green leaves, topped by stalks holding flat heads of white flowers from late spring. Ultra-invasive, this spreads quickly via underground stems to form a carpet.

Organic treatment It's tricky to control by hand, because any small pieces of root left in the soil will sprout to form new plants.

Chemical treatment Apply systemic weedkiller to the foliage as soon as it appears in spring. Re-apply throughout the growing season.

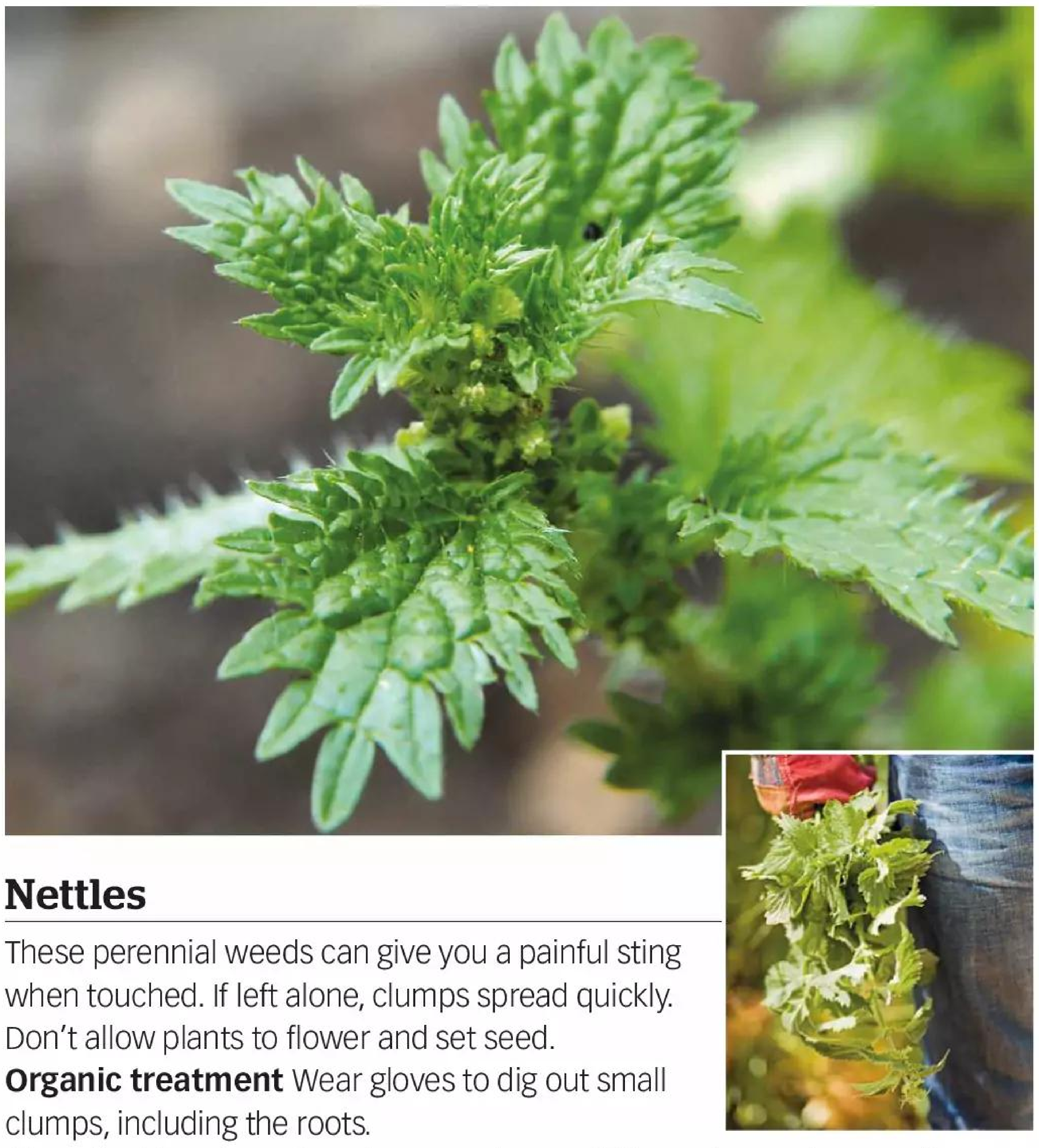


Hairy bittercress

A rosette-forming annual weed with white flowers. It grows and flowers almost all year round. The seed pods explode to spread their contents far and wide on the wind.

Organic treatment Pull out seedlings before they have a chance to set seed. Hoeing and mulching bare areas helps to deter it.

Chemical treatment Use contact weedkiller to kill seedlings and young plants before they grow and get a chance to flower.



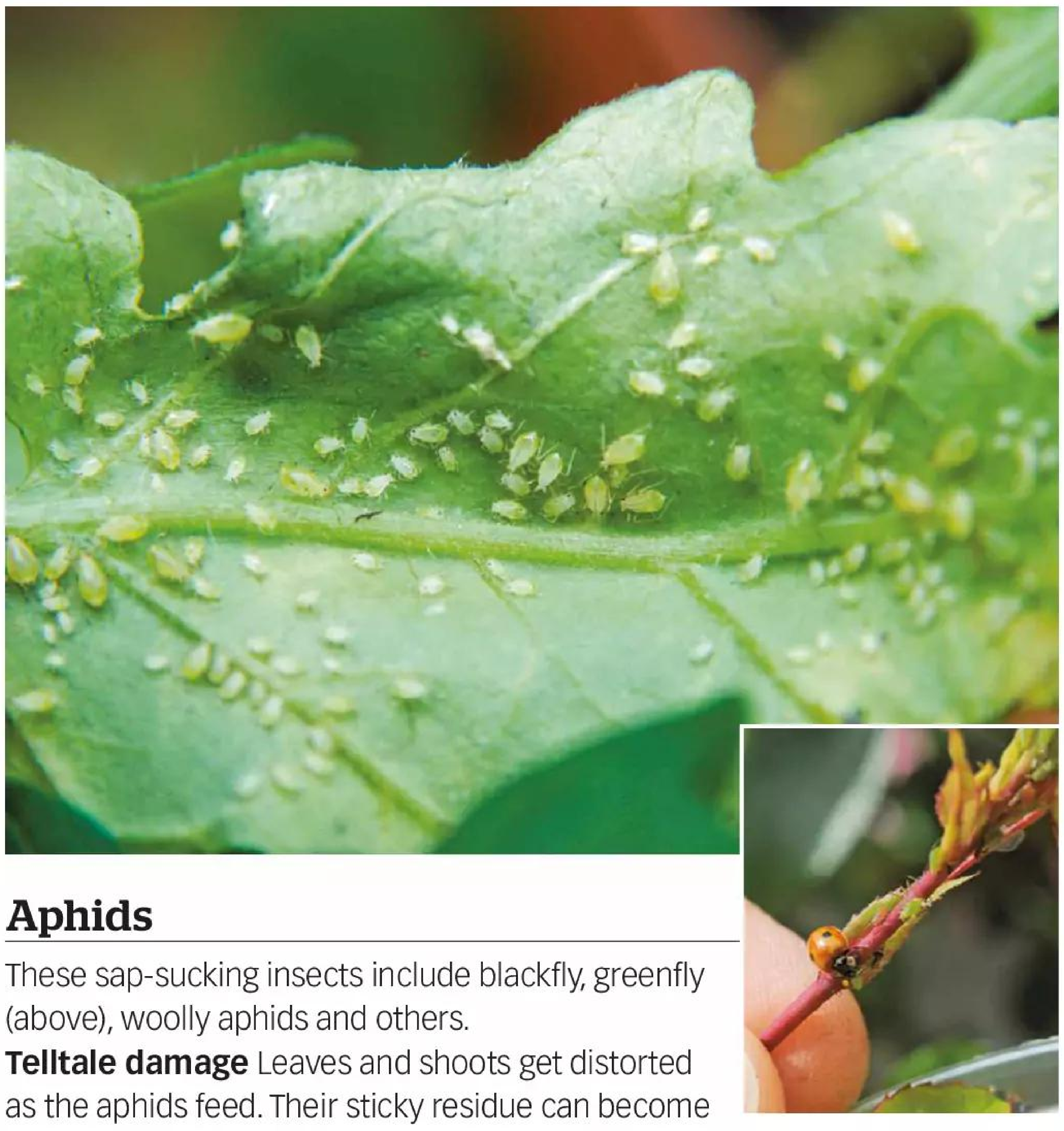
Nettles

These perennial weeds can give you a painful sting when touched. If left alone, clumps spread quickly. Don't allow plants to flower and set seed.

Organic treatment Wear gloves to dig out small clumps, including the roots.

Chemical treatment Apply systemic weedkiller to the newly emerging shoots in spring and make further applications as necessary. If treating in summer, cut down foliage and apply weedkiller to the regrowth that appears.

Pest control guide



Aphids

These sap-sucking insects include blackfly, greenfly (above), woolly aphids and others.

Telltale damage Leaves and shoots get distorted as the aphids feed. Their sticky residue can become covered with black mould, which prevents light reaching the leaves.

Crops affected Many types of crop.

The cure Rub them off by hand and remove shoot tips if infested, or use a spray or soapy water. Encourage predators such as ladybirds and hoverflies.

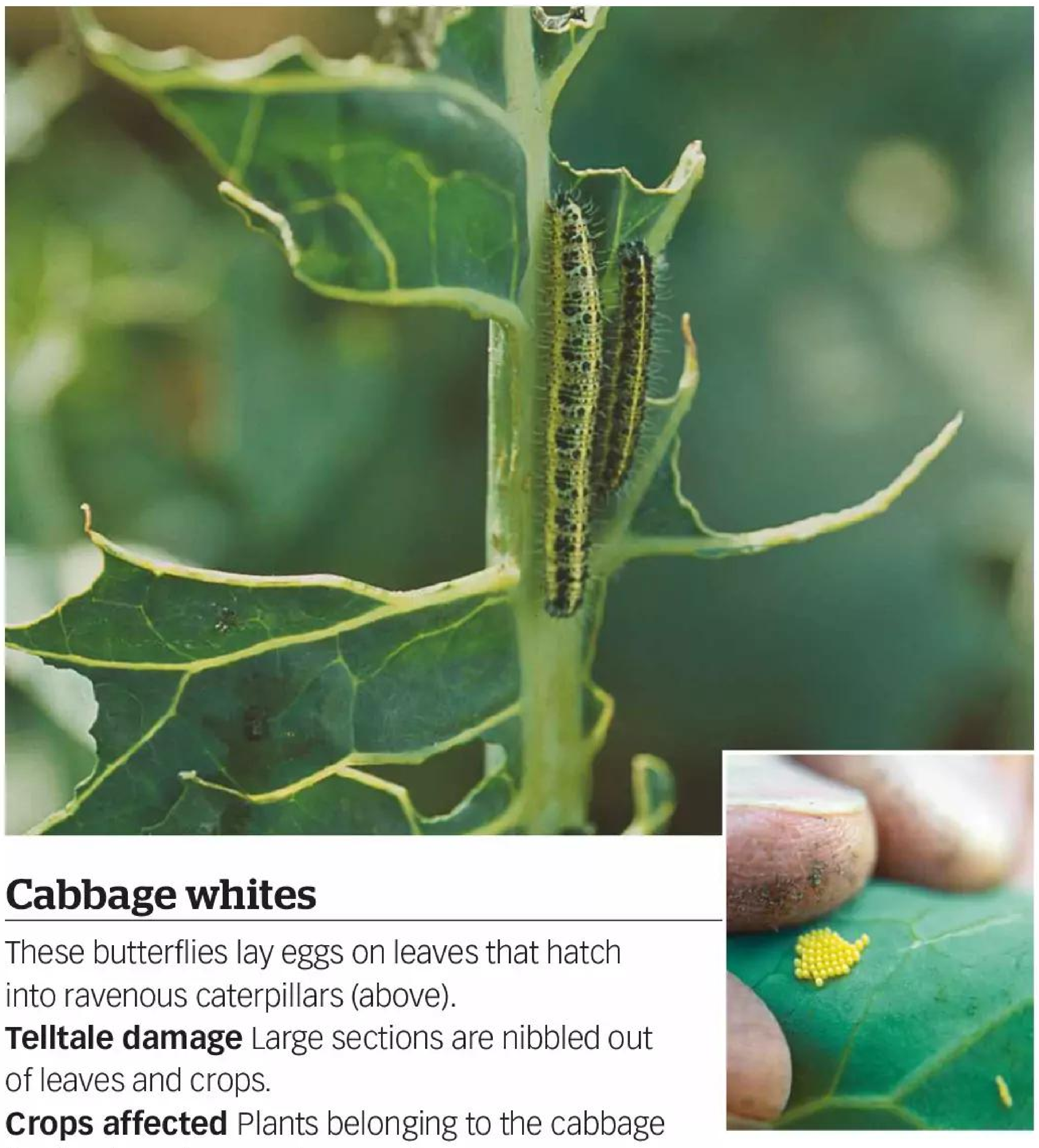
Birds

Pigeons, bullfinches, blackbirds and other birds can be a nuisance in the fruit and vegetable garden.

Telltale damage Buds are stripped and fruit and leaves are eaten.

Crops affected Berry-bearing crops, fruit trees and bushes, cabbages and other crops.

The cure Cover low-growing crops such as strawberries and cabbages with netting. Grow fruit in a netted cage. Use scarecrows to scare them away.



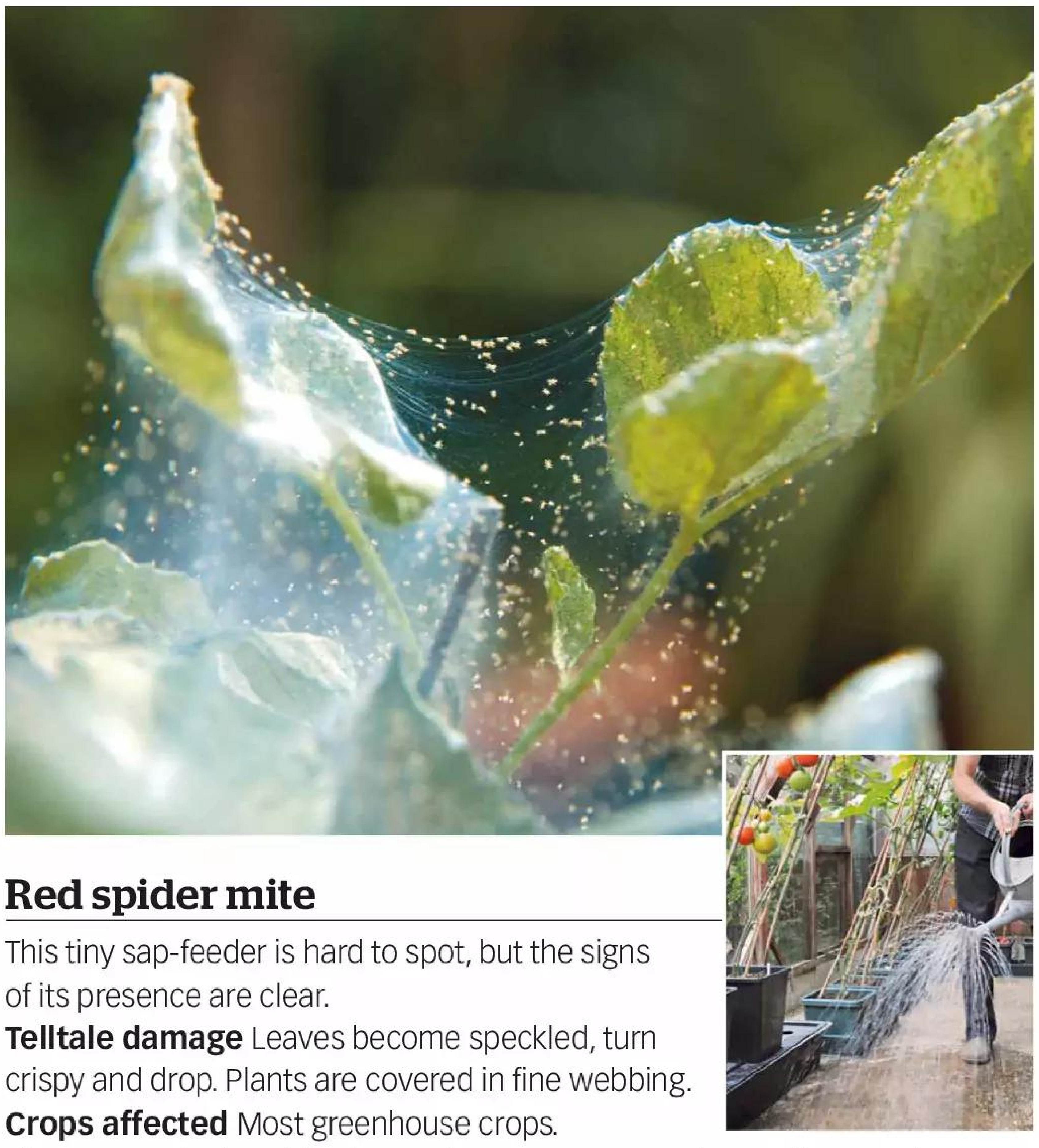
Cabbage whites

These butterflies lay eggs on leaves that hatch into ravenous caterpillars (above).

Telltale damage Large sections are nibbled out of leaves and crops.

Crops affected Plants belonging to the cabbage family. They also attack nasturtiums.

The cure Pick off and kill the caterpillars, which are green and yellow. As a last resort, spray with insecticide. Keep butterflies off crops with fine mesh.



Red spider mite

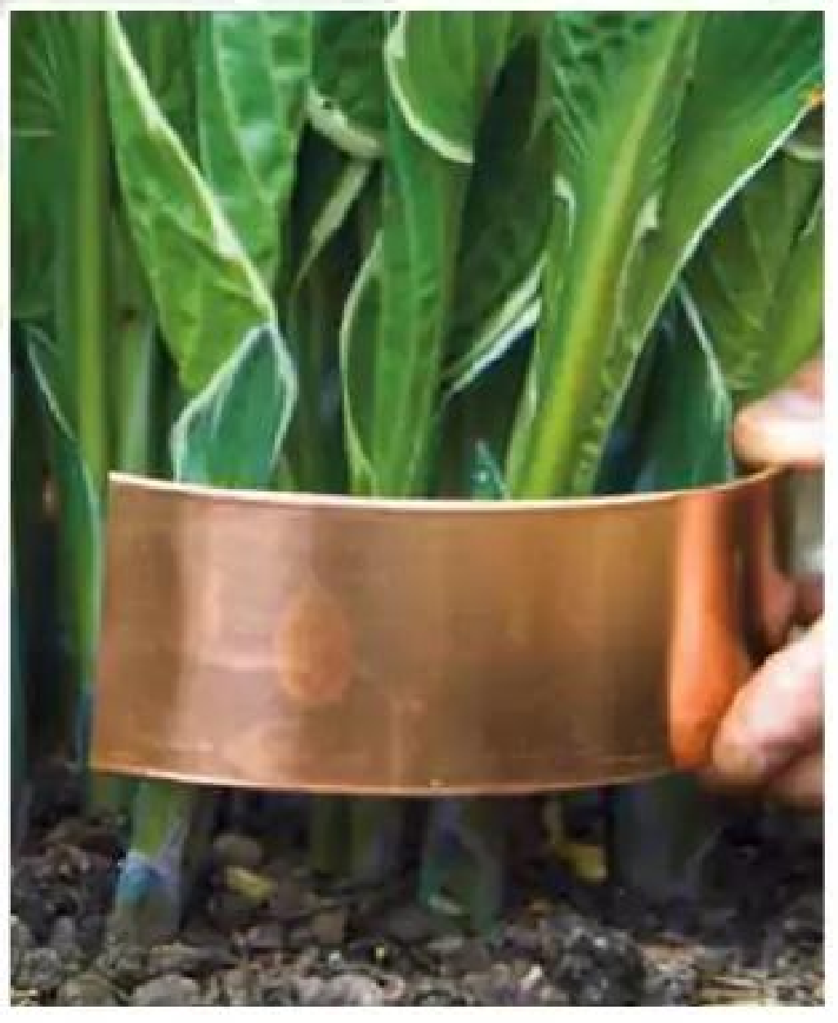
This tiny sap-feeder is hard to spot, but the signs of its presence are clear.

Telltale damage Leaves become speckled, turn crispy and drop. Plants are covered in fine webbing.

Crops affected Most greenhouse crops.

The cure Raise humidity by pouring water on greenhouse floors and use a biological control in the form of a predatory mite. Alternatively, apply a suitable spray to both the top and underside of leaves and all shoots.

While we all want to attract beneficial wildlife, there's another group of critters that we're not so happy to see. Here's our guide to tackling eight common garden pests



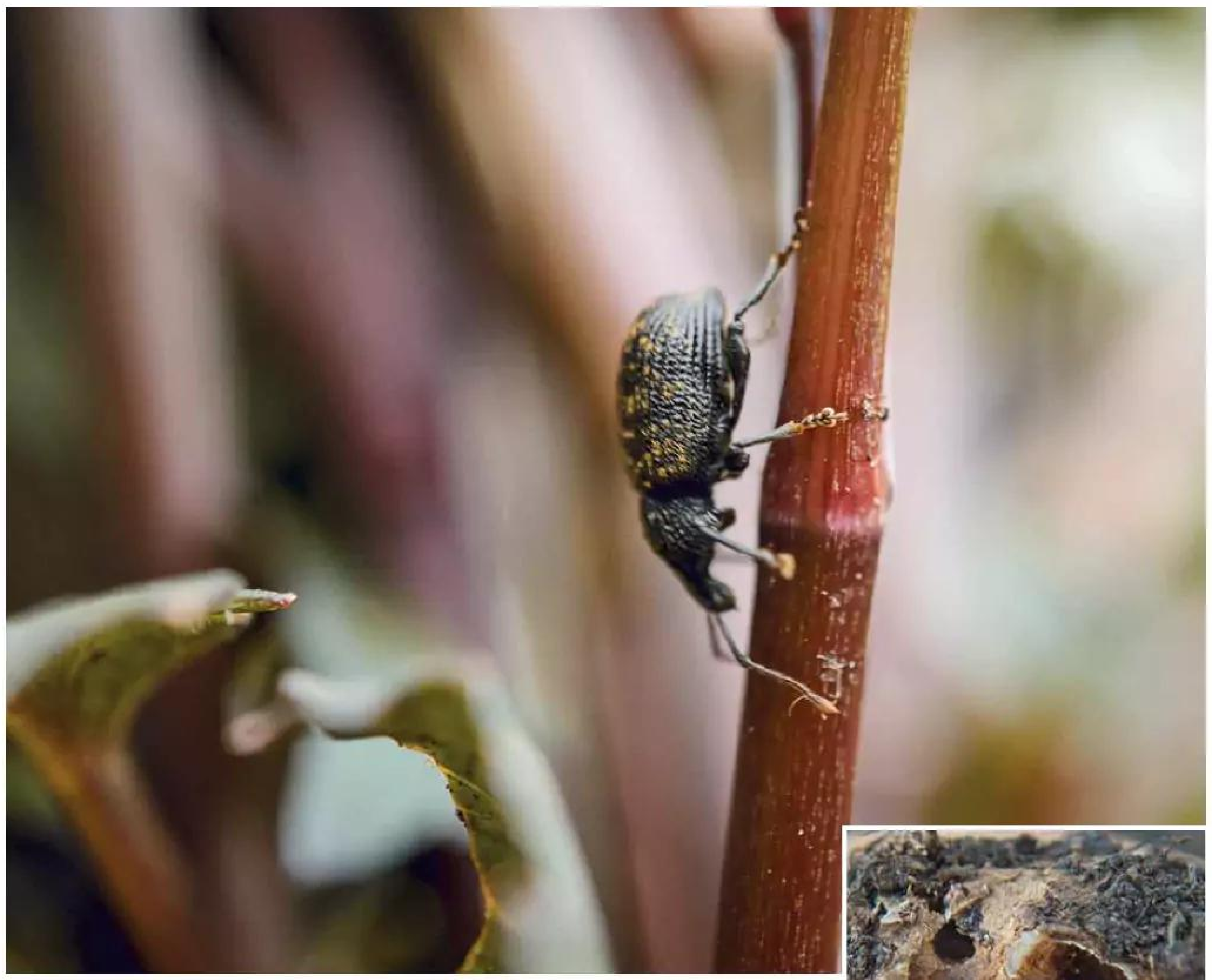
Slugs and snails

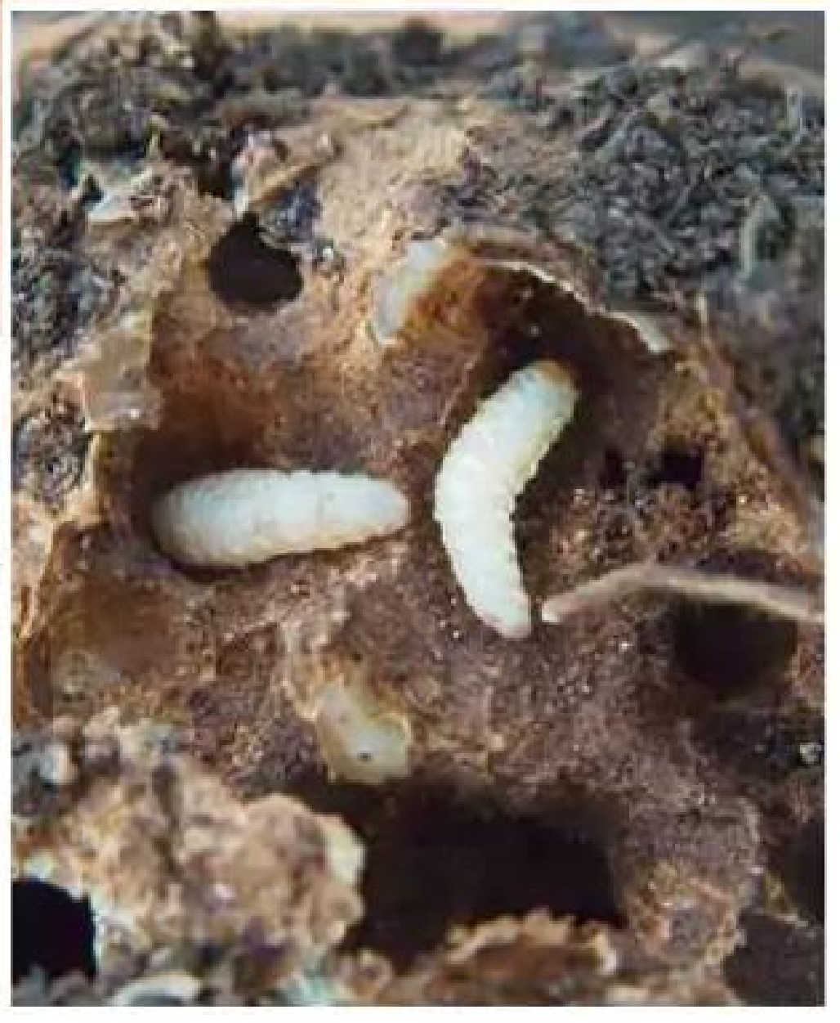
These are the gardener's worst enemy!

Telltale damage Nibbled holes in leaves, flowers, stems, fruit and roots. Seedlings completely eaten.

Crops affected Many types of crop.

The cure Biological controls can be used against slugs, while alternative methods such as beer traps also work well. Protect crops in containers by applying a band of copper tape around the rim. Encourage natural predators such as frogs, toads and thrushes.





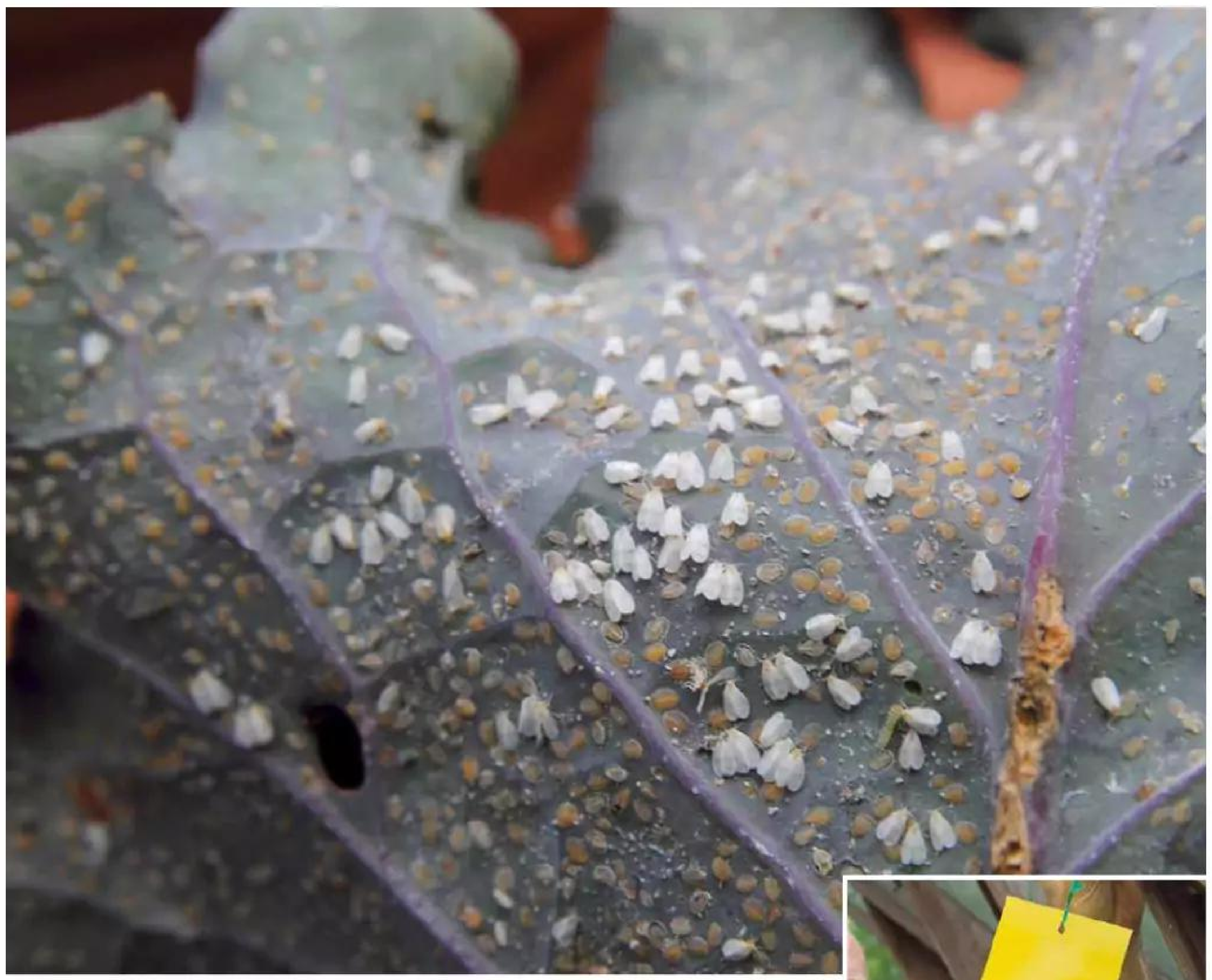
Vine weevils

Small beetles that hide under debris. They lay eggs in compost that hatch into C-shaped larvae (right).

Telltale damage Adult beetles eat neat notches around the edges of leaves. The larvae eat roots.

Crops affected Any fruit or vegetable growing in a pot is potentially at risk.

The cure Look for adult beetles on leaves and for larvae in compost – destroy any you find. There are no insecticides for use on edible plants, so water your compost with a biological control.



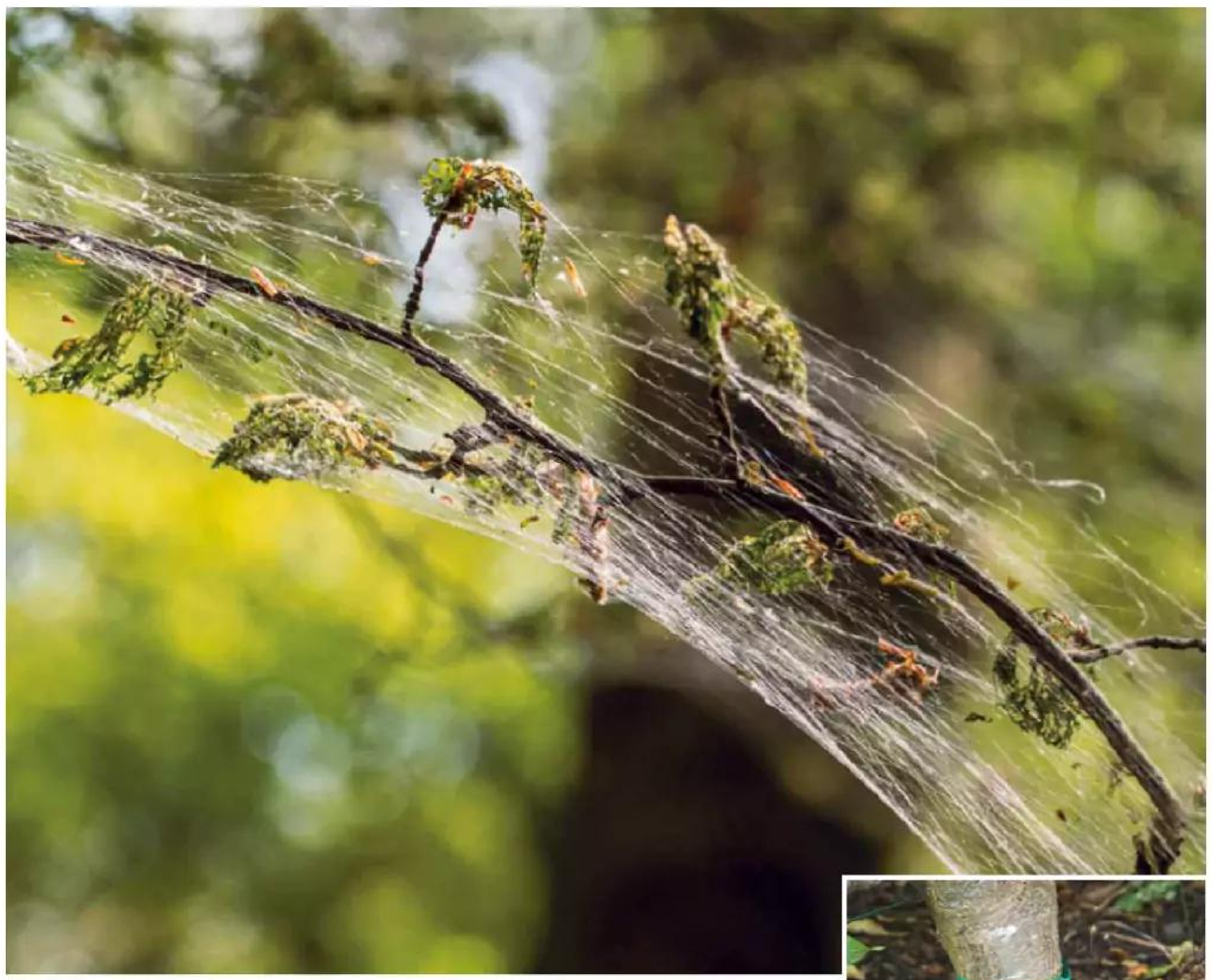
Whitefly

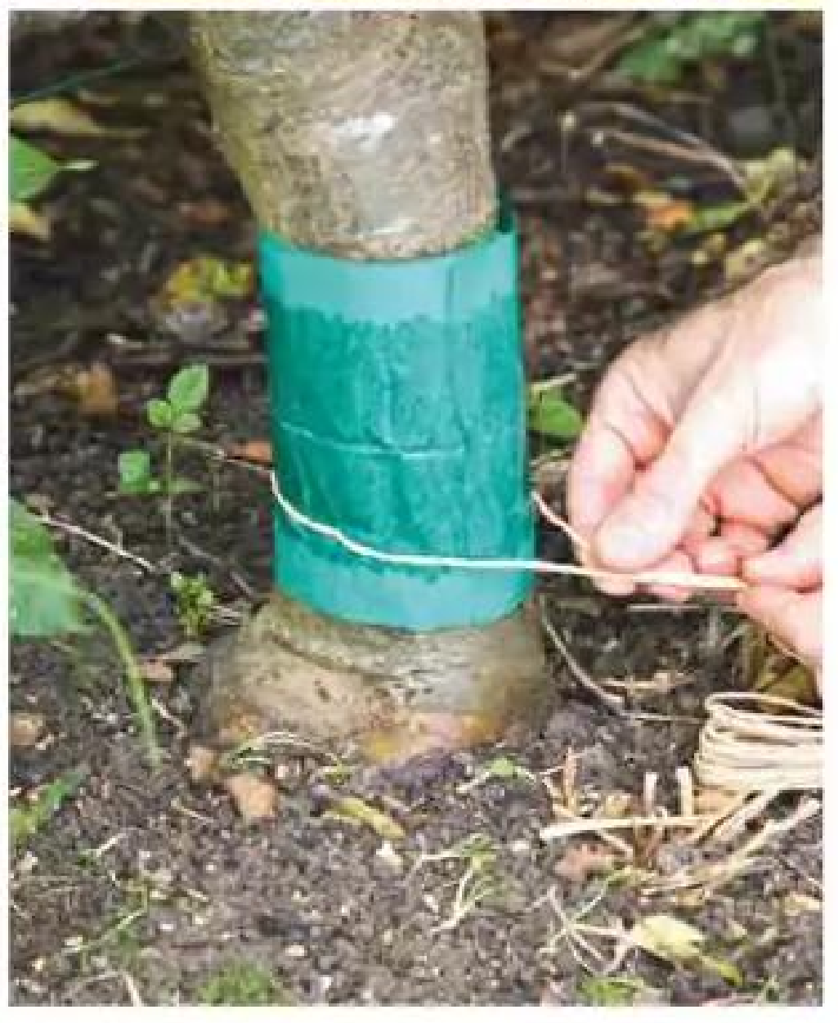
These aphids feed on greenhouse crops almost all year round.

Telltale damage Sap-sucking flies found on the underside of leaves. Sticky residue drops onto the foliage and becomes covered with sooty mould.

Crops affected All greenhouse crops.

The cure A biological control is effective, or hang up yellow sticky traps to catch them. Soaking foliage with a soap-based spray also controls adults.





Winter moths

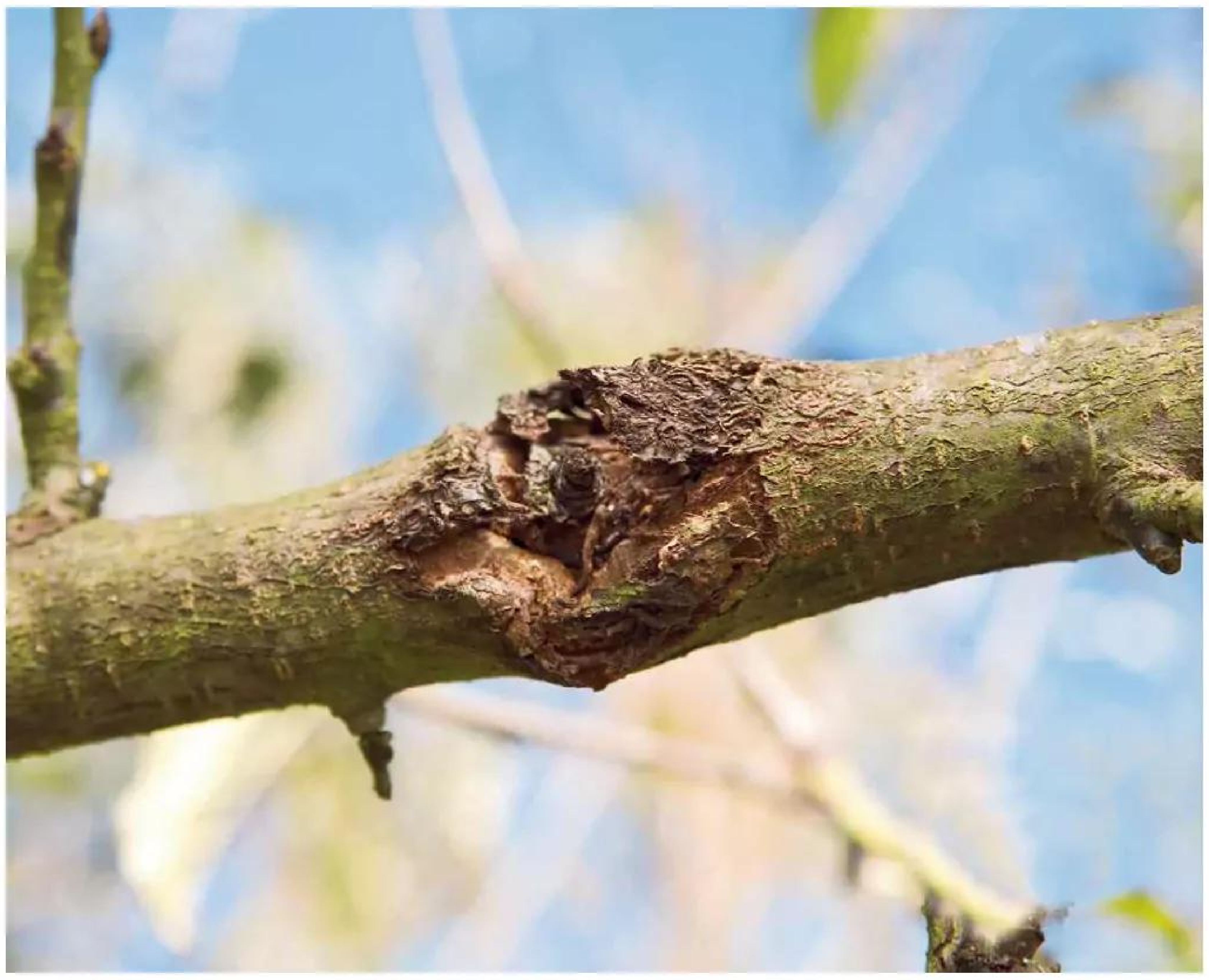
Flightless female moths climb fruit trees to lay their eggs, which hatch into yellowish caterpillars.

Telltale damage Leaves are bound together with silky threads and eaten. The moths bore into fruit and flowers, causing the fruit to become misshapen.

Crops affected Many tree fruits.

The cure Attach sticky grease bands to tree trunks in autumn to trap the females. As a last resort, spray caterpillar infestations.

Disease control guide



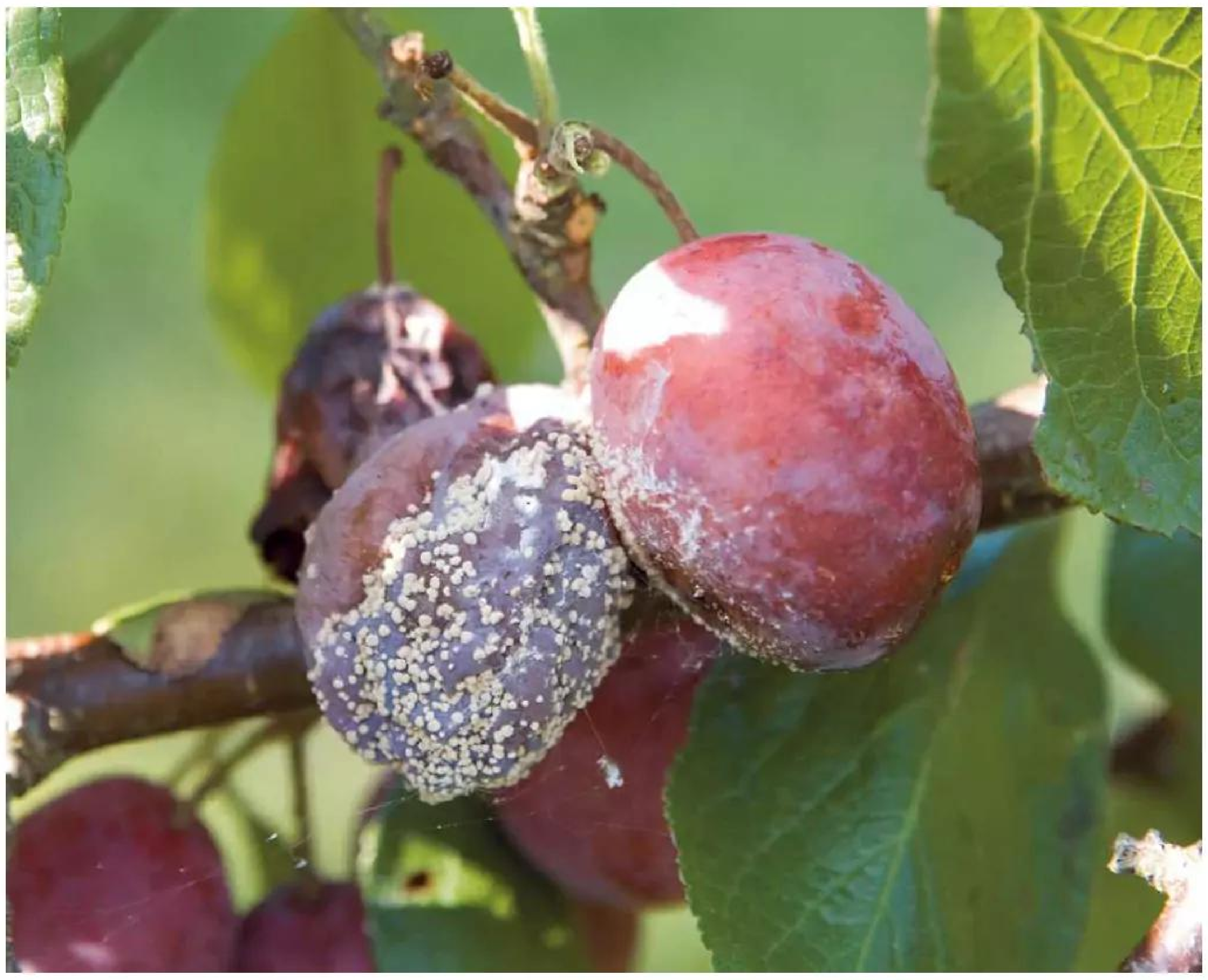
Bacterial canker

Sunken, flat, discoloured areas of bark appear, followed by oozing resin. Tree buds remain closed, leaves are small and yellow and may have holes.

The cause Bacteria enters trees through wounds, often caused by pruning, but sometimes as a result of pests. Tends to occur in a wet autumn or spring.

Crops affected Apples, cherries, pears, plums and other tree fruit.

The cure Remove infected areas, using secateurs or a pruning saw in summer. Safely dispose of infected material, and never add it to the compost heap.



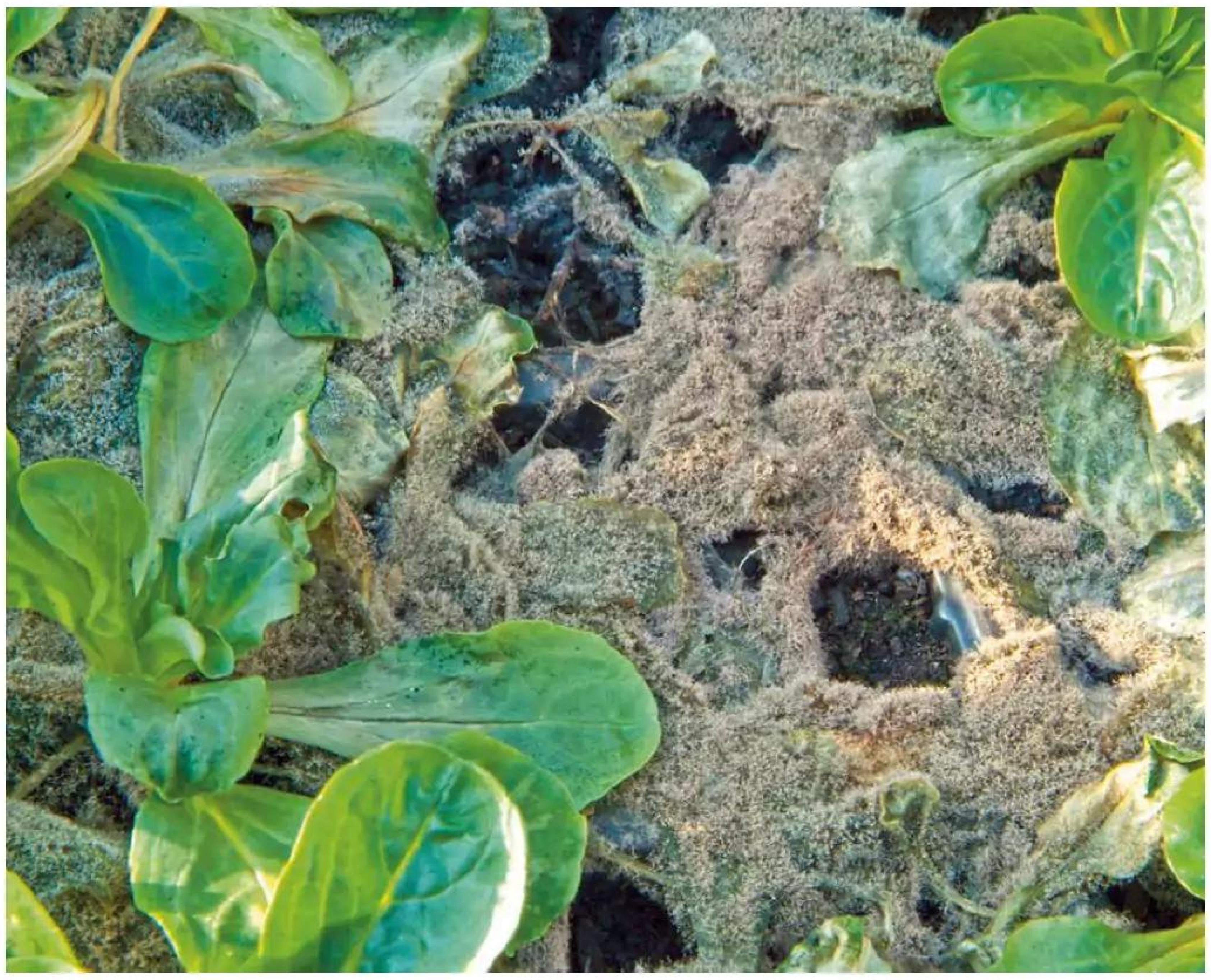
Brown rot

Fruits turn brown before being covered in raised white-ish pustules.

The cause Fungal spores enter the fruit through wounds, caused by rough handling when pruning or doing maintenance, or damage by birds and insects.

Crops affected Apples, pears and other tree fruit.

The cure Dispose of fallen fruits and those mummified on the tree. Cut back a portion of the stem to remove the infection. Take measures to deter pests from damaging fruits. Avoid future problems by thinning out fruits from early summer to stop them touching one another. Maintain good air around fruits.



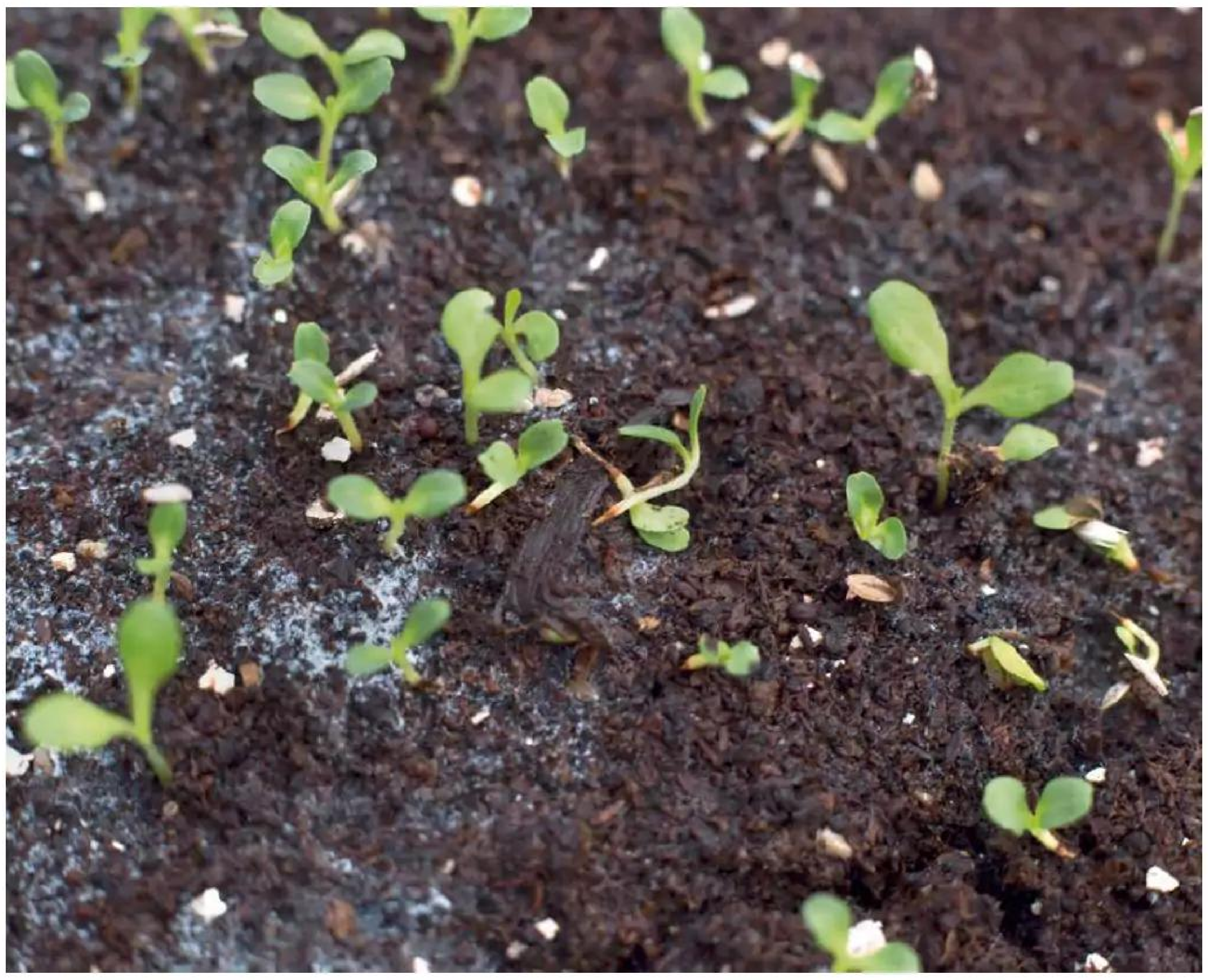
Botrytis

Flowers and leaves may be covered with fuzzy grey, white or brown growth, while discoloured patches appear on stems or fruit. Leaves can turn yellow and wilt, and fruit die. The disease often enters through damaged areas.

The cause A fungal rot spread by water splash or in the air.

Crops affected Broad beans, cabbages, lettuces, potatoes and tomatoes.

The cure Prune out infected plant tissue, ensuring you cut back into healthy growth. Badly infected or dead plants should be disposed of rather than put on the compost heap. Water sparingly so leaves are not wet in cool weather.



Damping off

Seedlings grown indoors collapse, often starting at one side of the pot or tray and spreading rapidly. They can be discoloured or covered with white growth.

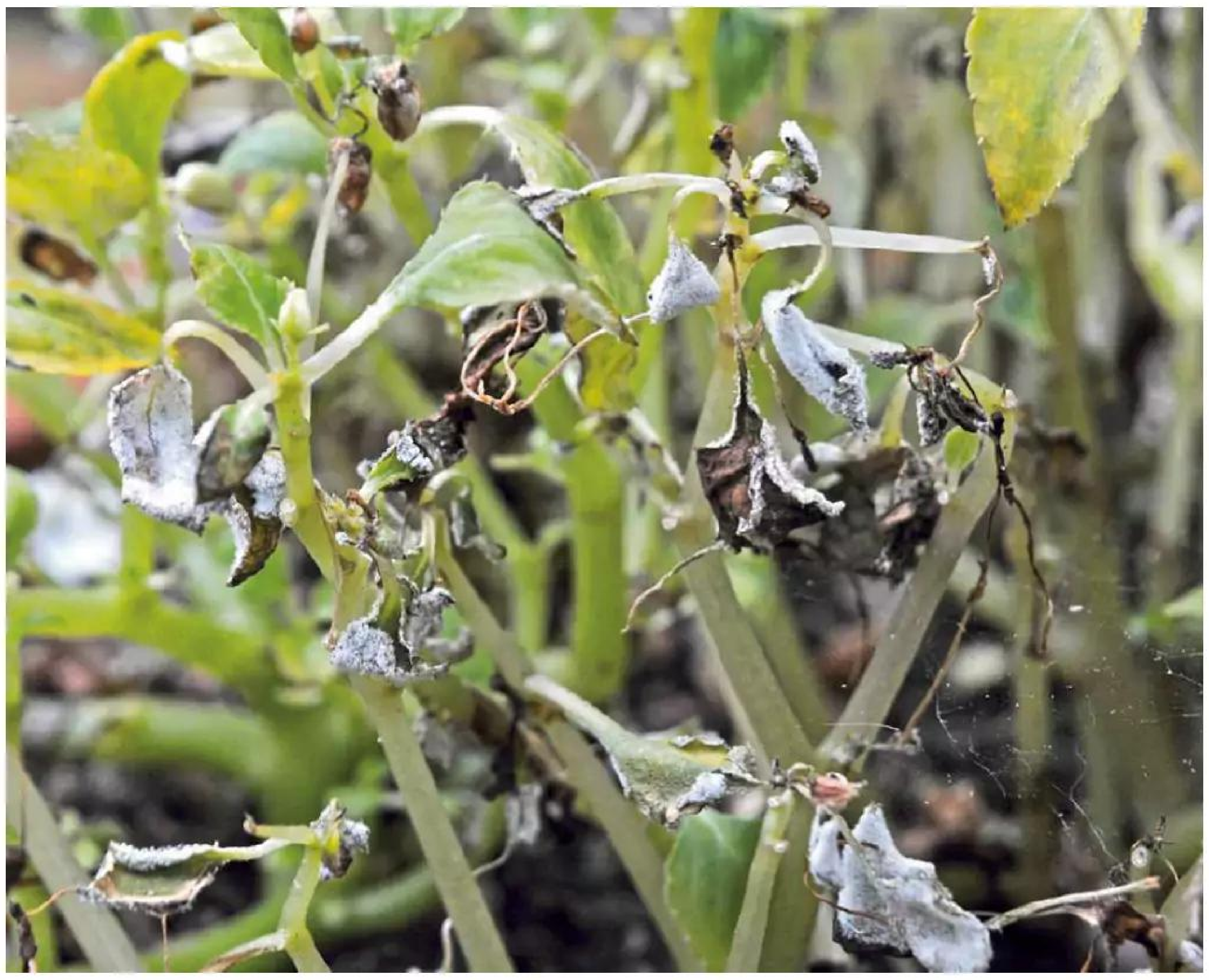
The cause Sowing seeds too thickly or allowing the compost to get too wet.

Crops affected All seedlings.

The cure Always use fresh compost and pots and trays sterilised with garden disinfectant. Make sure seeds aren't sown too thickly and grow them in a light but not too hot location. Use tap water rather than rainwater from a butt, which can harbour disease. Keep propagators well ventilated.

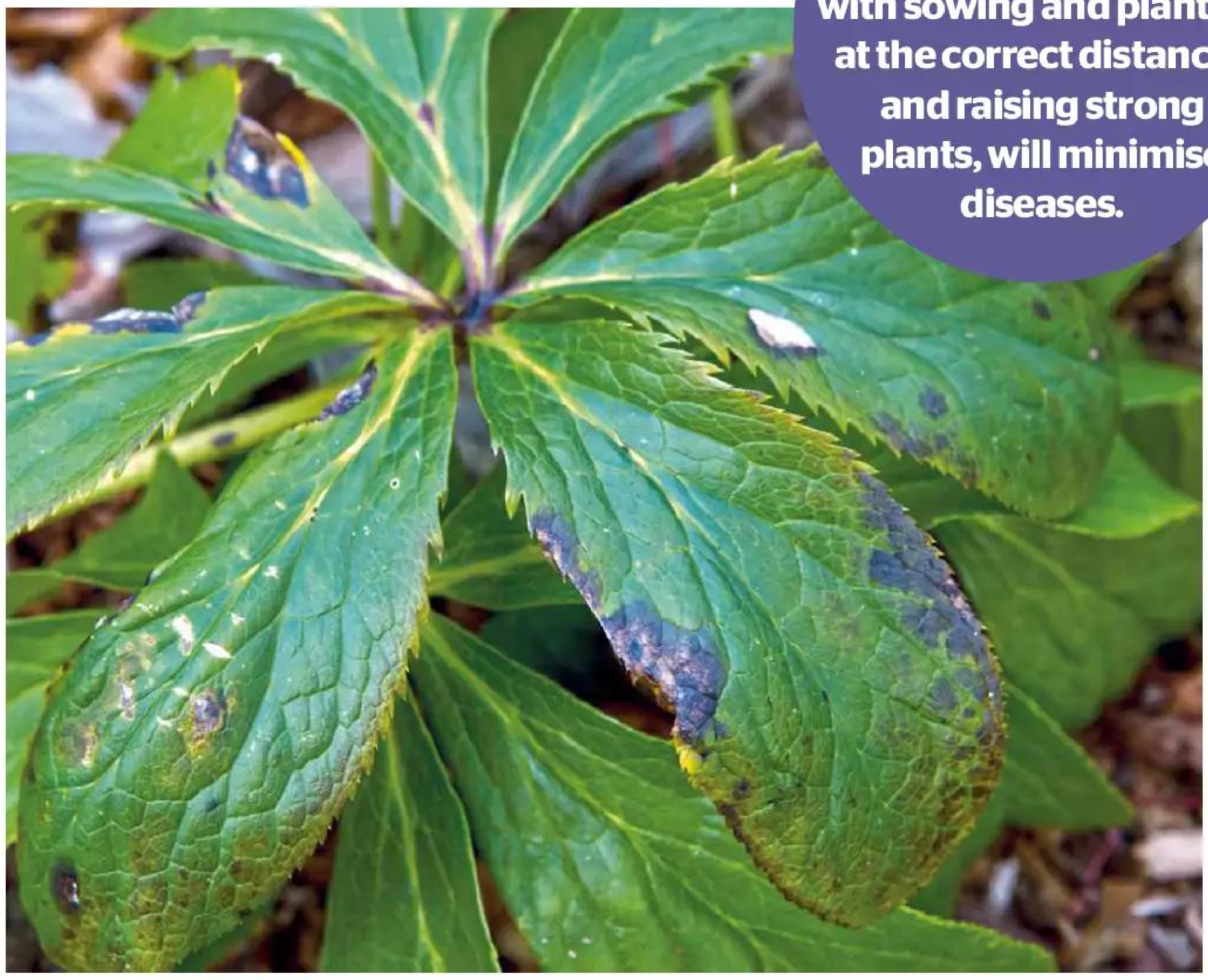
Growing your own is usually trouble-free, but there may be times when crops are struck by disease. Here's our guide to eight common types and how best to treat them

TOP TIP
Good hygiene, along with sowing and planting at the correct distances and raising strong plants, will minimise diseases.



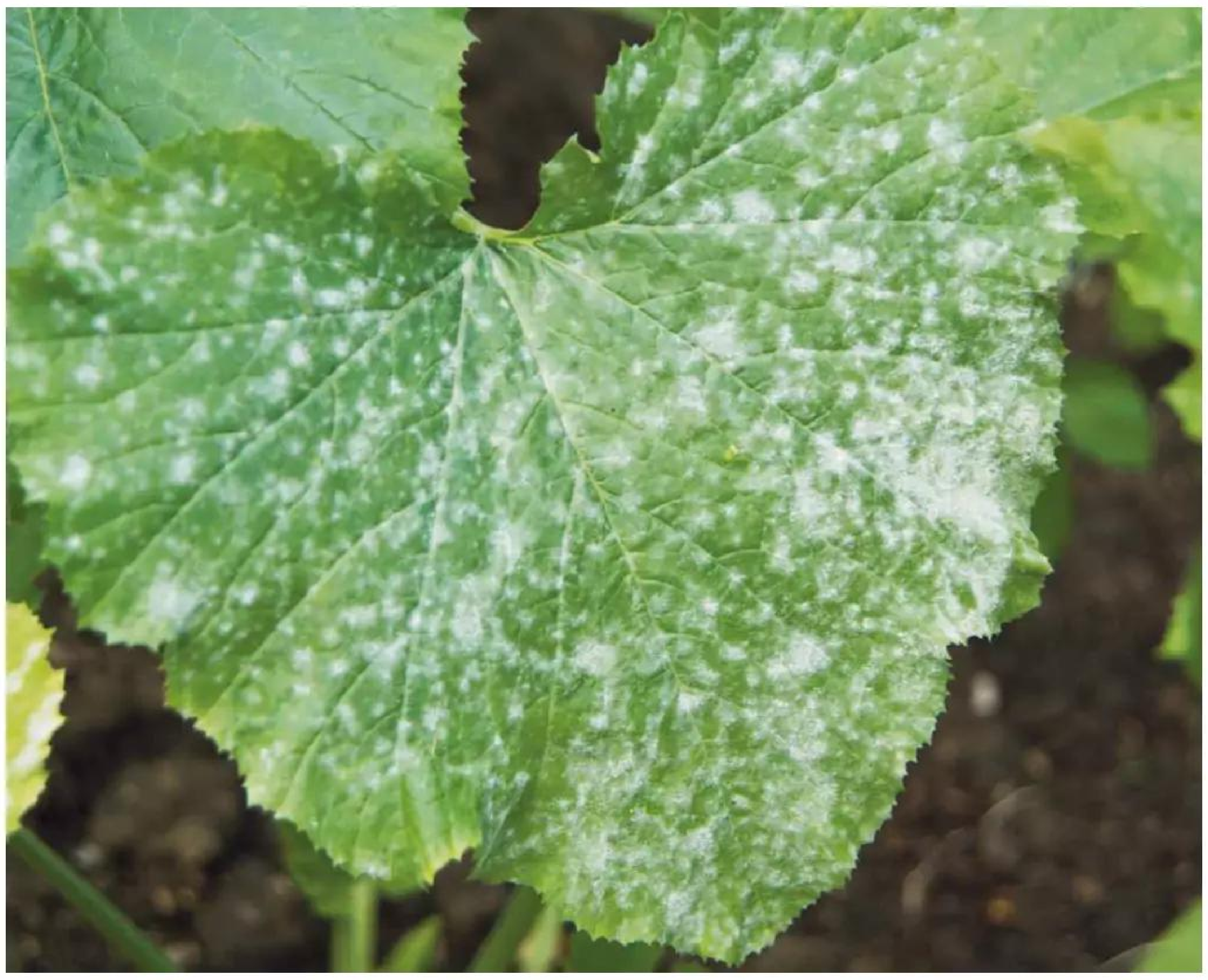
Downy mildew

Yellow areas develop on the upper surface of leaves with a corresponding grey fuzzy patch underneath. The leaves eventually die.
The cause Various fungi that prosper where air circulation is poor.
Crops affected A wide range, including carrots, cabbages, grapevines, lettuces, onions, spinach and some root vegetables.
The cure Remove infected leaves and improve air circulation by preventing weeds crowding out crops and ensuring that greenhouses are well ventilated. Avoid splashing foliage when watering.



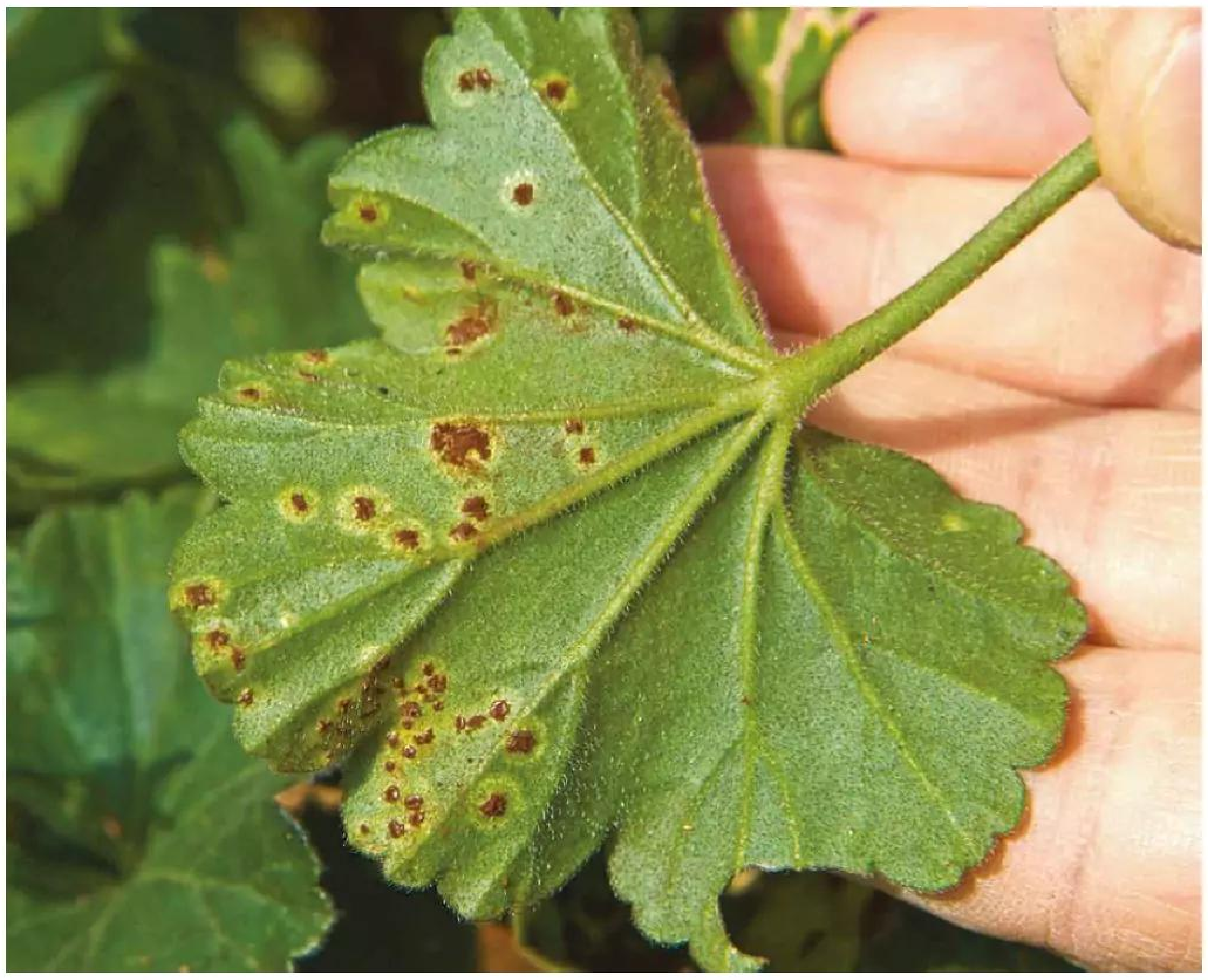
Leaf spots (bacterial and fungal)

Grey or brown spots appear on leaves and may spread and join together, causing large areas of the leaves to die. Damage is mainly cosmetic rather than detrimental to the health of the plant.
The cause Different fungi and bacteria are spread by water splashes.
Crops affected Beetroot, blackberries, cabbages, celery, currants, gooseberries, raspberries, Swiss chard and others.
The cure Firstly, remove all infected leaves and carefully dispose of them to avoid the risk of further infection. Try not to water plants from overhead.



Powdery mildew

A powdery white substance covers leaves and stems, eventually causing them to distort and turn yellow. Leaves can drop prematurely and plants may die. Infected fruits can crack.
The cause This fungal disease is most common when the soil is dry, while the air around the plants is humid.
Crops affected Carrots, courgettes, cucumbers, peas and many others.
The cure Remove infected growth, and keep plants well watered. Avoid watering from overhead.



Rust

Orange or brown pustules appear on leaves or stems, causing discolouration.
The cause A fungal disease spread in damp weather. Some weeds act as a host plant for rust, allowing it to overwinter and spreading to crops in spring.
Crops affected Asparagus, beetroot, broad beans, currants, garlic, gooseberries, leeks, mint, onions, pears and other crops.
The cure Remove infected growth, and grow resistant varieties where possible. Make sure all weeds are removed to reduce the risk of the disease finding plants to overwinter on.

Month by month guide

Dig compost or well-rotted farmyard manure deeply into vegetable plots to improve the soil structure and fertility.
Build raised beds using a kit or recycled lengths of timber.
Plant new fruit trees and bushes.
Prune apples and pears to limit the size and the shape of trees.
Order vegetable seeds, onion and shallot sets, seed potatoes and asparagus from specialist mail-order suppliers.
Sow onions, chillies, and sprouting seeds

Prepare beds by raking the soil level, breaking down lumps and removing stones.
Cover clumps of rhubarb with forcing jars or old buckets to get early crops.
Feed fruit with sulphate of potash to boost flowering and fruiting.
Bring potted strawberries into the greenhouse or cover plants with cloches for earlier crops.
Buy seed potatoes.
Sow the following crops indoors for planting out later: cauliflowers, leeks, lettuces, onions, salad leaves, chillies and spring cabbages.

Cover beds with cloches to warm the soil for early sowings of broad beans, carrots, hardy peas, parsnips and salads.
Plant asparagus crowns, artichokes and bare-root strawberry runners.
Hoe regularly to prevent weed seedlings growing.
Order vegetable plants by mail-order.
Plant out onion and shallot sets.
Feed brassicas with pelleted chicken manure.
Plant early potatoes in the ground or grow them in large containers.
Sow cucumber, pepper and tomato seeds indoors.

Water crops regularly during dry weather.
Feed tomatoes and other crops regularly.
Cover crops with fleece or fine netting to keep off cabbage white butterflies and other pests.
Plant out leeks. Harvest early potatoes.
Transplant cabbage and brassica seedlings to their final position.
Prune stone fruit and trained apples and pears.
Pinch out the tips of side shoots on plums and peaches. Thin out congested fruits.
Peg down strawberry runners to raise new plants.
Sow seeds of beans, chard, lettuces, radishes, spinach, swede and more.

Pick tomatoes as they ripen. Keep the plants well watered and fed, especially if growing in pots or growing bags.
Cut down potato tops if blight strikes.
Harvest onions, potatoes, shallots and sweetcorn.
Water crops regularly during dry weather.
Prune apple, pear and other fruit trees to control their size.
Transplant rooted strawberry runners.
Pick early-ripening apple crops.
Sow chard, coriander, lettuces, radishes, spring cabbages, turnips for green tops, winter spinach and more.

Pick blackberries and autumn raspberries as they ripen. When crops are finished, prune away fruited canes at ground level and tie in new shoots.
Plant spring cabbages.
Cut away all foliage from strawberry plants and remove unwanted runners.
Wrap grease bands around the stems of apple trees to trap pests.
Harvest sweetcorn at peak ripeness.
Raise marrows and squashes to ripen in the sun.
Plant autumn onion sets.
Sow cauliflowers, Chinese cabbages, winter spinach and more.

When you start growing your own, the list of jobs can seem daunting, especially if you don't know what to do when. Follow our guide and you'll find it easy to stay on top of your plot

April

Sow seeds directly outdoors, including beetroot, broad beans, carrots, coriander, lettuces, peas, radishes, spinach and more.
Sow tender crops under cover to plant outside in June, including marrows, sweetcorn and tomatoes.
Place straw or mats under developing strawberry fruits to raise them off the soil.
Tie new stems of raspberry and cane fruits to supports.
Plant maincrop potato varieties.
Cover fruit blossom with horticultural fleece to protect from night frost.

May

Build wigwams using bamboo canes or hazel poles, and sow climbing beans at the base.
Cover soft fruits with netting to protect from birds.
Pinch out the growing tips of broad beans to prevent blackfly infestations.
Harvest rhubarb by pulling stems away at the base. Harvest asparagus.
Sow pots of herbs.
Draw up earth around emerging potato shoots.
Hang pheromone traps in apple and plum trees to catch moths.
Sow seeds outdoors in shallow drills: cabbages, peas, rocket, salads, spinach and more.

June

Pick early sugarsnap peas and broad beans.
Plant out tender crops raised under cover, including chillies, courgettes, pumpkins, sweetcorn and tomatoes.
Water strawberries to boost yields.
Thin out congested rows of seedlings.
Pinch out the side shoots on cordon tomatoes.
Tie any new growth on cane fruits to their supports.
Make repeat sowings of salad crops fortnightly.
Pick herbs to dry and store.
Plant annuals among veg to attract hoverflies.
Look out for blight on tomatoes and potatoes.
Sow mizuna, pak choi, sugarsnap peas and others.

October

Harvest apples as they ripen. Some can be eaten straight away, while other varieties can be stored in food bags in the fridge or on slatted trays for several months.
Pick all outdoor tomatoes before frost strikes.
Cover tender herbs and crops with cloches or fleece to protect from cold weather.
Pot up herbs for use in winter.
Harvest marrows, onions, potatoes, pumpkins and more.
Save the seeds from beans, peas and many other crops.
Sow broad beans and hardy peas.

November

Sow garlic cloves in modular trays under cover. Plant outside when well rooted.
Cut down all the canes of autumn raspberries at soil level.
Bring all hoses and watering equipment indoors for the winter.
Clear away old crops and put the remains on the compost heap.
Store bamboo canes and supports indoors.
Cut away asparagus stems at soil level.
Fork over any bare areas of soil.
Plant cane fruits such as blackberries.
Sow broad beans during mild spells outdoors.

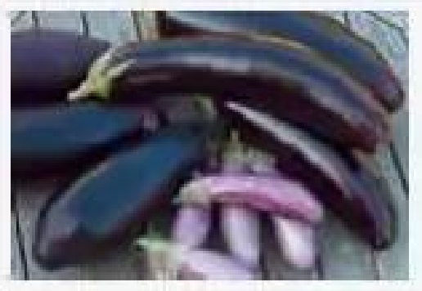
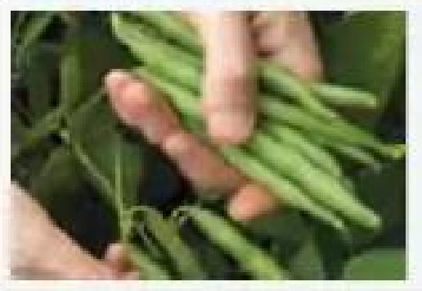
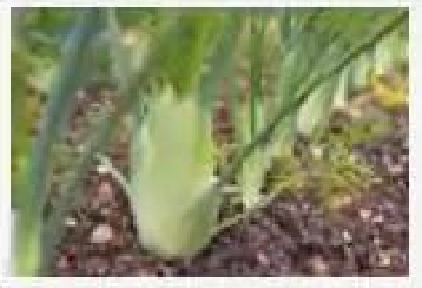
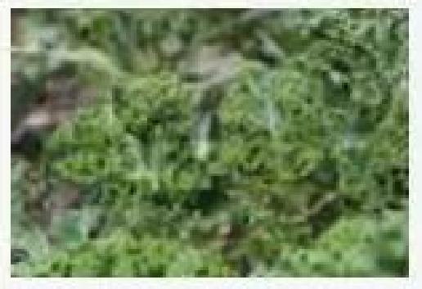
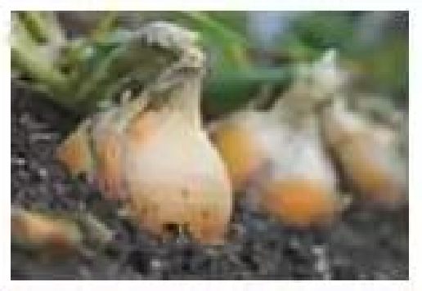
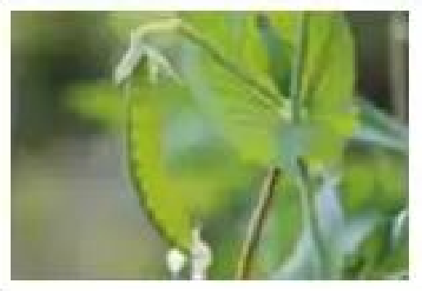
December

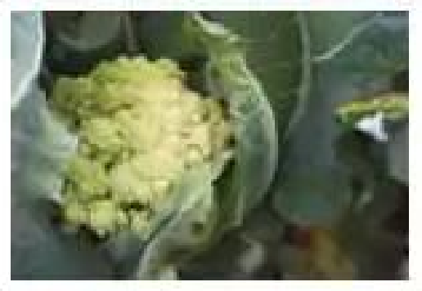
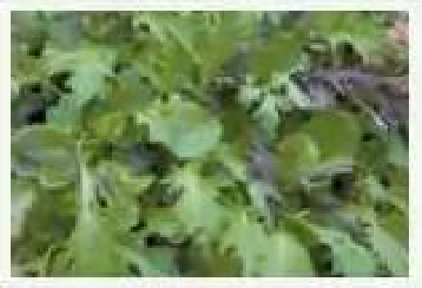
Clear away all the remains of old crops.
Take hardwood cuttings from currants and gooseberries.
Prune apple and pear trees to stimulate new growth.
Dig over the vegetable plot and fork compost deep into the soil.
Plant bare-root fruit trees and bushes.
Send off for seed catalogues.
Lift and divide large clumps of rhubarb.
Cover crops with cloches.
Prune established blackcurrant bushes.
Check stored crops for signs of rot.

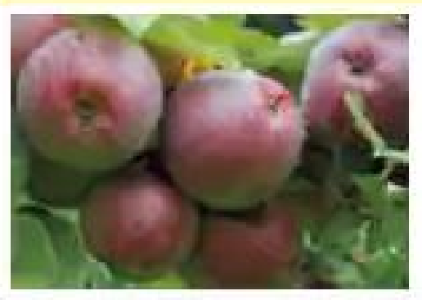
At a glance year planner

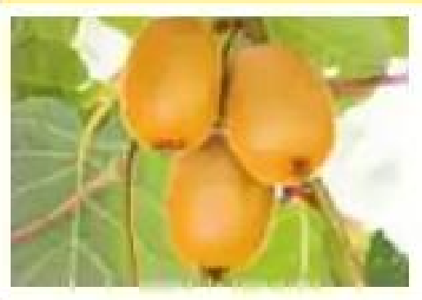
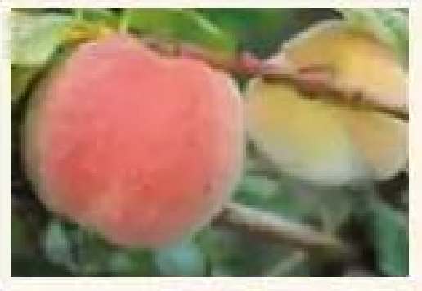
All you need to know when to sow and harvest for perfect results

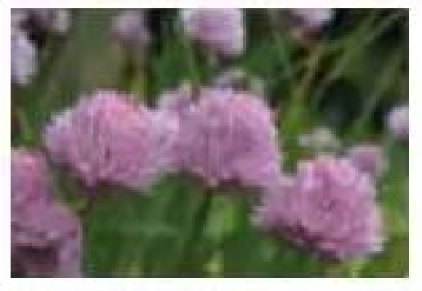
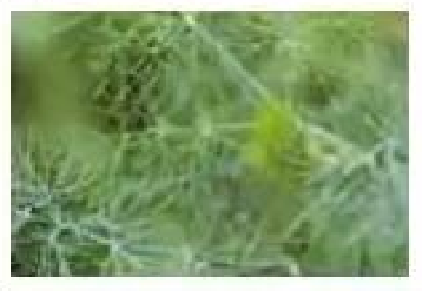
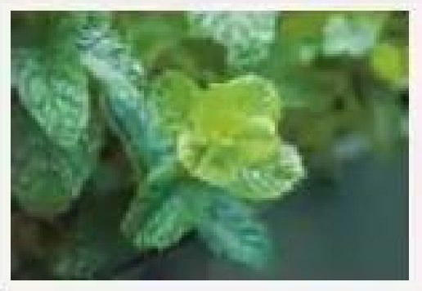
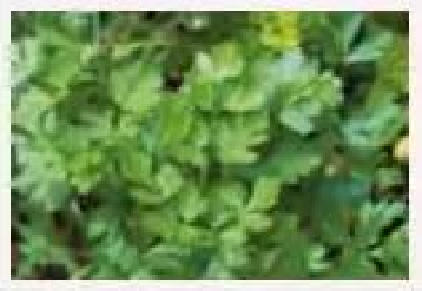
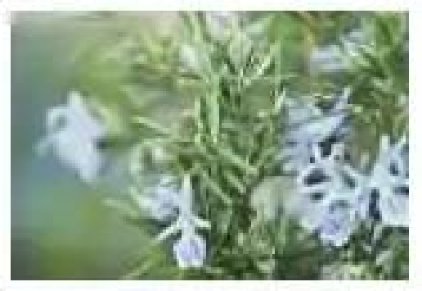
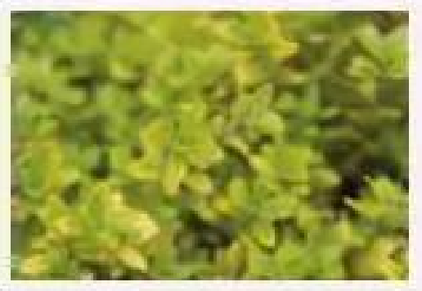
🟧 **Sow** ▨ **Plant** 🟩 **Harvest**

Vegetables	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Asparagus Sow ↓ 5cm **Final spacing** ↔ 30cm apart ⤡ 45cm between rows			▨	🟩	🟩	🟩						
 **Aubergines** Sow ↓ 2.5cm **Final spacing** ↔ 40-45cm apart ⤡ 40-45cm between rows	🟧	🟧	🟧	🟧	▨	▨	🟩	🟩	🟩			
Beans, Broad Sow ↓ 5cm **Final spacing** ↔ 20cm apart ⤡ 20cm between rows	🟧	🟧	🟧	🟧▨	▨ 🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩		🟧	🟧	
 **Beans, French** Sow ↓ 5cm **Final spacing** ↔ 15cm apart ⤡ 45cm between rows				🟧	🟧▨	🟧▨	🟧 🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩		
Beans, Runner Sow ↓ 5cm **Final spacing** ↔ 20cm apart ⤡ 60cm between rows				🟧	🟧▨	🟧▨	▨ 🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩		
Beetroot Sow ↓ 1cm **Final spacing** ↔ 10cm apart ⤡ 30cm between rows			🟧	🟧	🟧	🟧 🟩	🟧 🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩		
Broccoli Sow ↓ 2cm **Final spacing** ↔ 30cm apart ⤡ 45cm between rows	🟩	🟩	🟧 🟩	🟧 🟩	🟧▨	🟧▨	▨ 🟩	▨ 🟩	🟩	🟩		
Cabbages Sow ↓ 2cm **Final spacing** ↔ 25-45cm apart ⤡ 30-60cm between rows	🟩	🟩	🟧 🟩	🟧▨ 🟩	🟧▨ 🟩	🟧▨ 🟩	🟧▨ 🟩	🟧▨ 🟩	▨ 🟩	▨ 🟩	🟩	🟩
Carrots Sow ↓ 1cm **Final spacing** ↔ 5-8cm apart ⤡ 30cm between rows	🟧	🟧	🟧	🟧	🟧 🟩	🟧 🟩	🟧 🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩
Celeriac Sow ↓ 1cm **Final spacing** ↔ 30cm apart ⤡ 45cm between rows	🟩	🟩	🟧 🟩	🟧		▨				🟩	🟩	🟩
Chicory Sow ↓ 1.5cm **Final spacing** ↔ 30cm apart ⤡ 30cm between rows			🟧	🟧	🟧▨	🟧▨	🟧 🟩	🟧 🟩	🟧 🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩
Courgettes Sow ↓ 2.5cm **Final spacing** ↔ 90cm apart ⤡ 90cm between rows				🟧	🟧▨	🟧▨	🟩	🟩	🟩			
Cucumbers Sow ↓ 2.5cm **Final spacing** ↔ 60cm apart ⤡ 30cm between rows			🟧	🟧	🟧▨	🟧▨	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩		
 **Fennel** Sow ↓ 1.5cm **Final spacing** ↔ 30cm apart ⤡ 30cm between rows				🟧	🟧▨	🟧▨ 🟩	🟧 🟩	🟩	🟩			
Garlic Plant ↓ 5cm **Final spacing** ↔ 18cm apart ⤡ 30cm between rows	▨	▨	▨		🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟧	🟧	🟧
 **Kale** Sow ↓ 1cm **Final spacing** ↔ 45cm apart ⤡ 45cm between rows	🟩	🟩	🟧 🟩	🟧	🟧▨	🟧▨	▨		🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩
Leeks Sow ↓ 1cm **Final spacing** ↔ 15cm apart ⤡ 30cm between rows	🟩	🟧 🟩	🟧	🟧	▨	▨	▨	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩
Lettuces Sow ↓ 1cm **Final spacing** ↔ 10-20cm apart ⤡ 30cm between rows			🟧 🟩	🟧 🟩	🟧 🟩	🟧 🟩	🟧 🟩	🟧 🟩	🟧 🟩	🟩	🟩	
 **Onion sets** **Plant** Leave tips showing **Final spacing** ↔ 10-15cm apart ⤡ 30cm between rows			▨	▨		🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩	▨	▨	
Parsnips Sow ↓ 1.5cm **Final spacing** ↔ 15cm apart ⤡ 30cm between rows	🟩	🟩	🟧	🟧	🟧				🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩
 **Peas** Sow ↓ 3cm **Final spacing** ↔ 10cm apart ⤡ 30cm between rows	🟧	🟧	🟧	🟧	🟧	🟧 🟩	🟧 🟩	🟩	🟩	🟧 🟩	🟧	

Vegetables (continued)	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Peppers & chillies Sow ↓ 0.5cm **Final spacing** ↔ 45cm apart ⤡ 60-75cm between rows		🟧	🟧	🟧	▨	▨						
							🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩		
Potatoes Plant ↓ 12cm **Final spacing** ↔ 30-38cm apart ⤡ 75cm between rows	CHIT	CHIT	🟧▨	🟧▨	▨							
					🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩		
Pumpkins & squash Sow ↓ 2.5cm **Final spacing** ↔ 90cm apart ⤡ 90cm between rows			🟧	🟧	🟧▨	🟧▨						
						🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩		
Radishes Sow ↓ 1cm **Final spacing** ↔ 2.5cm apart (winter 23cm apart) ⤡ 15cm between rows		🟧	🟧	🟧	🟧	🟧	🟧	🟧				
	🟩	🟩			🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩
 **Romanesco** Sow ↓ 1cm **Final spacing** ↔ 45cm apart ⤡ 60cm between rows				🟧	🟧	🟧▨	▨					
									🟩	🟩	🟩	
 **Salad leaves** Sow ↓ 1cm **Final spacing** ↔ 15cm apart ⤡ 15cm between rows			🟧	🟧	🟧▨	🟧▨	🟧▨	🟧	🟧			
	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩
Shallot sets **Plant** Leave tips showing **Final spacing** ↔ 15-20cm apart ⤡ 30cm between rows	▨	▨	▨	▨							▨	▨
							🟩	🟩				
Spinach Sow ↓ 2.5cm **Final spacing** ↔ 7.5cm apart ⤡ 30cm between rows			🟧	🟧	🟧			🟧	🟧	🟧		
	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩
Spring Onions Sow ↓ 1cm **Final spacing** ↔ 2.5-5cm apart ⤡ 10cm between rows			🟧	🟧	🟧	🟧	🟧	🟧	🟧			
			🟩	🟩		🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩		
Sweetcorn Sow ↓ 2.5cm **Final spacing** ↔ 45cm apart ⤡ 45cm between rows				🟧	🟧	🟧▨						
							🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩		
Swiss chard Sow ↓ 1.5cm **Final spacing** ↔ 25-30cm apart ⤡ 40cm between rows			🟧	🟧	🟧▨	🟧▨	🟧					
								🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩
Tomatoes Sow ↓ 1cm **Final spacing** ↔ 40cm apart ⤡ 40-60cm between rows		🟧	🟧	🟧	▨	▨						
							🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩		
Turnips Sow ↓ 1cm **Final spacing** ↔ 15-23cm apart ⤡ 30cm between rows for maincrop		🟧	🟧	🟧	🟧	🟧	🟧	🟧				
			🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩

Fruit	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
 **Apples** **Height x Spread** 1.5m-6m x 1-4.5m **Space** ↔ 1.9m apart	▨	▨	▨							▨	▨	▨
							🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩		
Blackberries **H x S** 1.8m x 1.8m **Space** ↔ 1.5m apart ⤡ 2m between rows	▨	▨	▨							▨	▨	▨
							🟩	🟩	🟩			
Blueberries **H x S** 1.8m x 2m **Space** ↔ 1.2m apart in borders	▨	▨	▨								▨	▨
							🟩	🟩	🟩			
Cherries **H x S** 3-5m x 3-5m **Space** ↔ 1.5m apart	▨	▨	▨							▨	▨	▨
						🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩			
Currants **H x S** Varies depending on type **Space** ↔ 1.5m apart ⤡ 1.8m between rows	▨	▨	▨							▨	▨	▨
						🟩	🟩	🟩				
Figs **H x S** 2-3m x 3-3.5m **Space** ↔ 3-5m apart			▨	▨					▨	▨	▨	
							🟩	🟩	🟩			
Gooseberries **H x S** 1.5m x 1.5m **Space** ↔ 1.5m apart	▨	▨	▨	▨	▨				▨	▨	▨	▨
							🟩	🟩				
Grapes **H x S** Varies depending on type **Space** ↔ 1.2-1.5m apart ⤡ 1.5-1.8m between rows	▨	▨	▨							▨	▨	▨
								🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩	

Fruit (continued)	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
 **Kiwis** **H x S** 6m x 4m **Space** ↔ 3-4.5m apart			▨	▨	▨			🟩	🟩	🟩		
 **Peaches & Nectarines** **H x S** Fans 1.8m x 3.5m **Space** ↔ 3.6-4.5m apart	▨	▨	▨			🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩		▨	▨
Pears **Hx S** Fans varies depending on type **Space** ↔ 5.5m apart	▨	▨	▨					🟩	🟩	🟩	▨ 🟩	▨
Plums **H x S** Fans 2m x 3m **Space** ↔ 3-4.5m apart	▨	▨	▨					🟩	🟩		▨	▨
Raspberries **H x S** Varies depending on type **Space** ↔ 45cm apart ↘ 1.8m between rows	▨	▨	▨	▨		🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩	▨ 🟩	▨	▨
Rhubarb **H x S** 1.4m x 1.4m **Space** ↔ 90cm apart	▨	▨	▨ 🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩			▨	▨	▨
Strawberries **H x S** 30cm x 45cm **Space** ↔ 30-45cm apart ↘ 60cm between rows			▨	▨	▨ 🟩	🟩	▨ 🟩	▨ 🟩	▨ 🟩	▨		

Herbs	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Bay **H x S** Up to 8m x 10m	🟩	🟩	▨ 🟩	▨ 🟩	▨ 🟩	▨ 🟩	▨ 🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩
Basil **Sow** ↓ 0.5cm **Space** ↔ 30cm apart ↘ 30cm between rows		🟧	🟧	🟧		▨ 🟩	▨ 🟩	🟩	🟩			
 **Chives** **Sow** ↓ 1cm **Space** ↔ 30cm apart ↘ 25cm between rows			🟧	🟧 ▨	🟧 ▨		🟩	🟩	🟩			
Coriander **Sow** ↓ 1cm **Spacing** ↔ 25cm apart ↘ 30cm between rows						🟧 ▨	🟧 ▨ 🟩	🟧 🟩	🟧 🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩
 **Dill** **Sow** ↓ 1cm **Space** ↔ 25cm apart ↘ 25cm between rows				🟧	🟧 ▨	🟧 ▨ 🟩	🟧 ▨ 🟩	🟩	🟩			
 **Mint** **H x S** Groundcover to 1m high; spread indefinite			▨	▨	▨ 🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩		
Oregano **Sow** ↓ 1cm **Final spacing** ↔ 30cm apart ↘ 30cm between rows		🟧	🟧	🟧 ▨	🟧 ▨ 🟩	▨ 🟩	▨ 🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩		
 **Parsley** **Sow** ↓ 1cm **Space** ↔ 15cm apart ↘ 30cm between rows			🟧	🟧	🟧 ▨	🟧 ▨ 🟩	▨ 🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩		
 **Rosemary** **H x S** 30cm-2m x 80cm-2m	🟩	🟩	▨ 🟩	▨ 🟩	▨ 🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩	▨ 🟩	▨ 🟩	▨ 🟩	🟩
Sage **Sow** ↓ 1cm **Space** ↔ 15cm apart ↘ 30cm between rows	🟩	🟩	🟧 🟩	🟧 ▨ 🟩	🟧 ▨ 🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟧 🟩	🟧 🟩	🟩	🟩
Sorrel **Sow** ↓ 1cm **Space** ↔ 30cm apart ↘ 30cm between rows		🟧	🟧	🟧	🟧 ▨ 🟩	🟧 ▨ 🟩	🟧 ▨ 🟩	🟩	🟩			
 **Thyme** **H x S** 10-50cm x 10-50cm	🟩	🟩	▨ 🟩	▨ 🟩	▨ 🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩	▨ 🟩	▨ 🟩	▨ 🟩	🟩
Tarragon **H x S** 90cm x 40cm				▨	▨ 🟩	▨ 🟩	▨ 🟩	▨ 🟩	🟩			

🟧 **Sow** ▨ **Plant** 🟩 **Harvest**

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Glossary

Acidic soil/compost – usually has a pH value of 5 to 6.5.
Alkaline soil – usually has a pH value of 7.5 or above.
Bare root – plants lifted from the ground and sold unpotted in winter.
Beneficial wildlife – creatures that benefit your plants or help to control pests.
Biennial – a plant that produces leaves the first year, then flowers and sets seed in the second, before dying.
Biological control – using living organisms to control garden pests.
Blood, fish and bone – a general-purpose, balanced fertiliser.
Bolting – when a plant goes to seed prematurely.
Bonemeal – a fertiliser made from animal bones.
Chitting – letting seed potatoes form sprouts before planting.
Cold frame – an unheated structure used to protect plants from frost.
Cordon – a tree with one stem trained either vertically or at an angle
Crop rotation – growing crops in different beds each season to avoid the build up of disease.
Drill – a shallow trench for sowing seeds.
Ericaceous compost – suitable for growing acid-loving plants. See acidic soil/compost.
Espalier – a tree trained with horizontal branches.
Fan – a tree or bush with branches trained as a fan.
Fungicides – chemicals used to prevent the spread of fungal infections.
Hardening off – slowly acclimatising plants raised indoors to living outside.
Heavy soil – usually clay.
Mulch – material added to the surface of the soil to lock in moisture and suppress weeds.
Perennial – a plant that can live for many years.
Pricking out – moving seedlings into pots of their own.
Rootstock – the lower part of a grafted fruit tree, which controls its vigour.
Succession planting – sowing crops at regular intervals to ensure a regular supply of produce.
Tap root – long root found on vegetables and weeds.
Transplanting – moving a plant from pot to pot, or into the garden.
Tuber – the underground part of a plant.
Vermiculite – material found in compost mixes or used to cover seeds.

Where to buy

DT Brown
0333 003 0869
dtbrownseeds.co.uk

Franchi – Seeds of Italy
020 8427 5020
seedsofitaly.com

J Parker's
0161 848 1100
jparkers.co.uk

Kings Seeds
01376 570000
kingsseeds.com

Marshalls Seeds
01480 774555
marshalls-seeds.co.uk

Fothergill's
0333 777 3936
mr-fothergills.co.uk

Organic Gardening
0333 240 0776
organiccatalogue.com

Sarah Raven
01672 518610
sarahraven.com

Suttons Seeds
0333 043 0700
suttons.co.uk

Thompson & Morgan
0333 400 0033
thompson-morgan.com

Unwins
01480 443789
unwins.co.uk

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